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A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church

Nancy Elizabeth Clark
Butler University

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Name of candidate:

Nancy Elizabeth Clark

Oral examination:

Date May 20, 1966

Committee:

J. M. Waller, Chairman
J. S. Pope
J. H. L. L. L.

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Major Professor J. M. Waller
J. M. Waller

A HISTORY OF THE REFORMED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

by

Nancy Elizabeth Clark

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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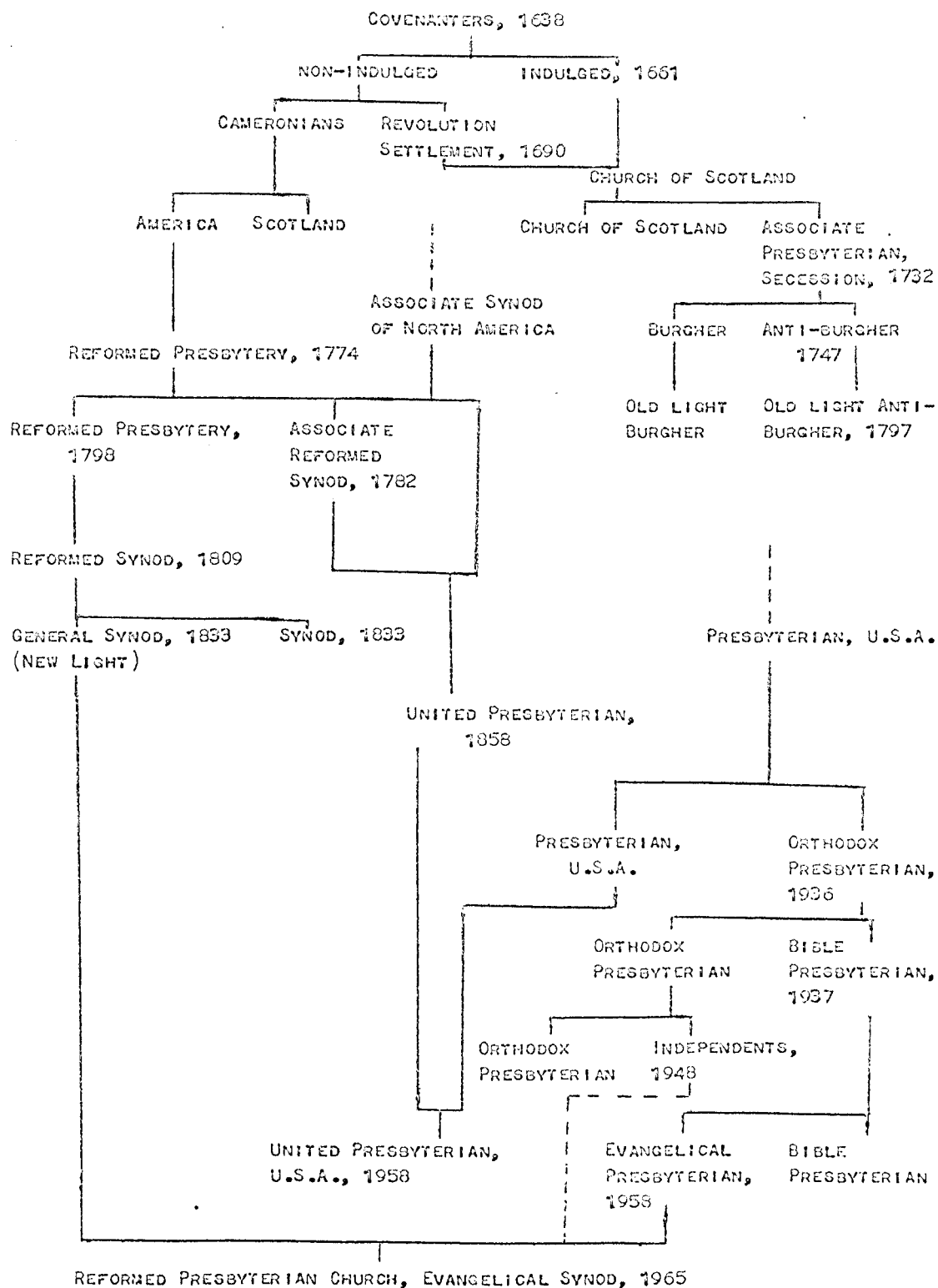
A true witness must possess some strong traits of character: intelligence, conviction, devotion, fortitude, self-denial, ability to endure reproach, perseverance against wind and tide of public sentiment, love of the truth burning in the heart more intensely than the love of life. These are qualities essential in the acceptable witness for Christ's truth, in those who would defend truth at the world's bar--truth as it redeems man and glorifies God.

McFeeters

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REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN GENEALOGY



INTRODUCTION

If any one event in history were caused by any other single event, or indeed if any trend of events were caused by any other single trend, historical research would be a relatively simple matter. But history is not so simple. A history of government does not involve politics alone, nor does a history of baseball involve simply the quality of the pitcher's and batter's techniques. Likewise the history of a church includes far more than the Sunday sermons, however important these may be.

The complexity of a given historical institution can perhaps be typified by the subject of the present study: the Reformed Presbyterian Church. As a church, this one is not at all typical, but as an historical problem, it rates well. Economic, cultural, social and geographic factors intertwine its growth, while through the years it has stood as a theological thunderbolt and a political peculiarity. Small though the physical features of this church may be in comparison with the immensity of certain other organizations, the breadth and depth of its history is just as great.

On the other hand, although in tracing the history

of the Reformed Presbyterian Church it would be possible to establish its Biblical foundations through the Old and New Testaments and the early Christian era, and theoretically feasible to follow the line of pure teaching through the Middle Ages and to the times of Huss, Wycliffe, and Lefevre, such a study, valuable as it certainly is, lies beyond the scope of this paper. Indeed Calvin, the master theologian who expresses perfectly the beliefs of every twentieth-century Reformed Presbyterian, and Knox himself, the conqueror of the Scottish soul, can scarcely be mentioned personally at all. The subject must be limited.

Thus, this paper is at once a limited yet a very complex study: limited in time and space, complex in issues.

CHAPTER I

SCOTTISH STRUGGLES

Decisive action taken and maintained by a person or group of people depends heavily on the ability perceptively to define the opponent and to clarify the issues involved. To John Knox, the enemy and the issues were clear. Scotland had to make a choice between Israel's Sovereign God and Romanism's "wafer-god" as Knox called it. By prayer, by preaching, by patient teaching to queen and commoner alike, the Truth began to be known. The solidity of Knox's teaching was occasionally mixed with a strain of cutting wit which drew the common folk the more readily to his side and baffled his opponents. The wafer-god, he explained,

. . . is a prey, if he be not well kept, to rats and mice, for they will desire no better dinner than whilte, round gods enow. But oh, then, what becometh of Christ's natural body? By miracle it flies to heaven again, if the Papists teach truly, for how soon soever the mouse takes hold, so soon flieth Christ away and letteth her gnaw the bread. A bold and puissant mouse, but a feeble and miserable god! Yet would I ask a question: 'Whether hath the priest or the mouse greater power?' By his words it is made a god; by her teeth it ceaseth to be a god. Let them advise and answer!¹

¹W. M. Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), pp. 59-60.

As long as Knox preached, and as long as his successor, Robert Bruce,² was able to influence the Scottish king who followed Elizabeth I on the throne of England, the Papists seemed unable to answer. But with the accession of Charles I to the throne and William Laud to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, the Roman Church was ready to answer the challenge offered by Knox a half-century earlier. Although the work had to be carried on in the guise of the Anglican Church, the intention was clear. Prayer books, prelacy, the entire Erastian movement was only a prologue to a complete return to Rome.³ Battle lines were drawn up once again: employees of the Crown, university men, and the upper classes attached to the Court formed the backbone of the Prelatic party, while Presbyterian Calvinism was supported by the burghers, the common people, the popular and active clergy, the country gentlemen, and those nobles who were descended from old Reformation families.⁴ It fell to a commoner to raise the war cry. Jenny Geddes, the old apple-woman of High Street, incensed by the newly enforced liturgy, threw her stool at the Dean of Edinburgh

²For an excellent treatment of Bruce's life and ministry, read D. C. Macnicol, Robert Bruce, Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh (London: Benner of Truth Trust), 1960.

³J. Douglas, Light in the North (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 22.

⁴James Dodds, The Fifty Years' Struggle of the Scottish Covenanters, 1638-1688 (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 25.

as he began to read the collect for the day.⁵ In the confusion that followed, the Presbyterians banded together, clarified the issues, and under the leadership of Alexander Henderson and Archibald Johnston of Wariston, prepared a document known as the National Covenant.⁶ Circulated throughout Scotland, the Covenant was signed by multitudes of staunch believers, who

. . . considering divers times before, and especially at this time, the danger of the true reformed religion, of the King's honour, and of the publick peace of the kingdom, by the manifold innovations and evils generally contained, and particularly mentioned in our late supplications, complaints, and protestations; do hereby profess, and before God, His angels, and the world, solemnly declare, That with our whole heart we agree, and resolve all the days of our life constantly to adhere unto and defend the aforesaid true religion, and . . . to labour, by all means lawful, to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel, as it was established and professed before the foresaid novations.⁷

They further declared, "That we have no intention nor desire to attempt any thing that may turn to the dishonour of God, or to the diminution of the King's greatness and authority . . ." And finally, they promised that "because we cannot look for a blessing from God upon our proceedings, except with our profession and subscription, we join such

⁵Taylor, The Scottish Pulpit, p. 18. Douglas, Light in the North, pp. 23-24, claims that the stool was thrown by an unknown woman, since no "Jenny" appears in the church records until twenty years later where she figures as a staunch Royalist.

⁶This Covenant was based on a similar one drawn up and signed in 1592.

⁷The National Covenant, 1638.

a life and conversation as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their covenant with God . . ."⁸

Within two months virtually the entire population of Scotland had signed the Covenant and an army of 30,000 was ready if the battle of words were to become indeed a battle of weapons.⁹

Events in England were building up to a crisis also; barely four years after the signing of the Covenant in Scotland, Charles was forced to flee from Whitehall and take refuge in Nottingham. England was plunged into civil war. The king hoped that his Scottish ancestry would persuade the Covenanters to come to his aid, whereas the Parliament, supported by the Puritans, was anxious for the Covenanters to join in on its side, for it seemed that if the Covenanters took part at all in the struggle, the army that they joined would be almost certain of victory.¹⁰ The Covenanters who at first chose to join the Parliamentary cause reached the peak of their influence in 1644 at Marston Moor; from that time on, Cromwell and the Independents held the power, while the Scots, with the exception of the Marquis of Argyle, by 1648 had rallied around Charles. The Covenanters lost the battle at Preston; the following year, Charles lost his head.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Dodds, Fifty Years' Struggle, p. 33.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 39.

During the Civil War years, Scottish and English theologians had met in London to draw up the document known as the Westminster Confession. The greatest statement of theological tenets, it stands three centuries later, unchanged, a monument to the wisdom of seventeenth-century England's spiritual giants. The almost sacred cooperation of English and Scots on this level makes it evident how great was the catastrophe of their inability to cooperate on the Parliamentary or military level. Accord among Covenanters, Puritans, and Independents might have spared them all their future suffering.

In 1643 while the Westminster Assembly was in session, the Convention of Estates drew up a document intending to bring Scottish and English interests together to insure success in the Civil War. Both in object and expression this document, styled the Solemn League and Covenant, was drawn from the National Covenant of 1638. Its major aims were reformation in the church and the establishment of a bond of mutual defense. This arrangement was accepted by the House of Commons, not because they were so interested in religious reformation, especially of the Covenanter variety, but because in their attempts for gaining civil liberty they needed help and were not in a position wisely to refuse the agreement offered.¹¹ Englishmen were not Covenanters, and Covenanters still hoped

¹¹Hume Brown, History of Scotland (Cambridge, 1912), Vol. II, pp. 326-330.

for the conversion of their back-slidden king.

And in 1651, the Scots were blind to the pride, the vanity, the fickleness of the royal Stuart heir. Against the crowning of Charles II, only Argyle among the nobles raised his voice in protest. His was a struggle not only to maintain the integrity of the National Covenant but to reach his ideal of a constitutional monarchy. For the Scottish grievances, from the beginning, were a problem of constitutional right. Laud's liturgy of 1637 caused the confusion on High Street not solely because it was a liturgy, but because it had been forced upon the people by the government without their consultation, let alone their consent. It was the same problem that John Hampden had faced concerning the payment of ship-money; it was the same problem that brought about the American Revolution a century and a half later. Argyle saw the problem and refused to give his allegiance to Charles II, for he believed, and history has justified his belief, that the House of Stuart was Britain's chief obstacle to constitutional government, and the one would have to go before the other could be established.

Although the despotic Charles ruled Scotland for nearly a decade, his power was restricted and the Church remained the same as it had been previous to his coronation: an evangelical, free, covenanted, Presbyterian Church. Matthew Hutchison, who published his history of the church in 1893, states, "Its spiritual jurisdiction was recognized

by the State, its governmental and doctrinal standards were approved and sanctioned by legal enactments, and the yoke of patronage was abolished."¹² It was the Scottish theory of government, encouraged by Argyle, that made this possible. In one of the outstanding treatises on government, *Lex Rex*, Samuel Rutherford had said that "the power of creating a man a king is from the people."¹³ It is not surprising then to read that after the Restoration, Argyle was one of the first to be executed by order of Charles II and Rutherford escaped the gallows only because sickness ended his life first. In 1661, Parliament passed the Act Rescissory, annulling all that the Scots had accomplished during their decade of a constitutional monarchy. Sadly they began to realize that their beloved Stuart was not of the same mettle of which other Scots were made; their enthusiasm of 1651 turned to tears and bloodshed.

In one of his more sarcastic moments, John Wesley exclaimed, "Oh, what a blessed Governor was that good-natured man, so called, King Charles the Second! Bloody Queen Mary was a lamb, a mere dove, in comparison to him!"¹⁴ Early in his reign, Charles decreed that any minister who had been ordained since 1649 must receive presentation from

¹²Matthew Hutchison, The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1893), p. 24.

¹³Dodds, Fifty Years' Struggle, p. 20, quoted from Rutherford's Lex Rex.

¹⁴Journal of John Wesley (Moody Press,), p. 295.

the patron and collation from the bishop, and that those who did not comply would lose their churches, their manse, the portion of the stipend then due, and must move beyond the bounds of their presbyteries. Perhaps Charles never expected the Scots to refuse to comply, but the very mention of patronage, the episcopal evil, was enough to drive 350 pastors from their churches. During 1663 the first field conventicles were held, and after the Pentland Rising in 1666, the persecution was intensified.¹⁵ However, in 1669, with the removal of the ruthless Sir William Ballantyne and Sir James Turner from military command in Scotland, came three years during which there was little persecution, and known in Covenanter annals as "The Blink." It was during these years that Charles announced his two Indulgences, offering positions to ministers who had lost their churches in 1662. The Indulgences looked innocuous enough to many people, but they added immeasurably to the Covenanters' problems, for it divided them into two groups: the Indulged, who were reinstated to the official ministry of Scotland by accepting the king as head of the church, and the Non-Indulged who refused to be enticed by Charles's

¹⁵The Pentland Rising was an altogether unpremeditated affair. Several Covenanters stopped at an inn one evening and found some of the king's men maltreating an elderly man. Defending the aged victim led to a show of arms, and the Covenanters, determined to set things right, marched to Dumfries where they captured Sir James Turner. Keeping him in custody--and he admitted that he was comfortably kept--they marched to Edinburgh, but were intercepted in the Pentland Hills by General Dalzell's numerous forces and defeated.

tempting offers. The ill effects of this division were keenly felt in 1679, when, after the Covenanter victory over Lord Claverhouse at Drumclog, they fell to quarrelling over the Indulgences, and, divided, they were defeated at the sad encounter at Bothwell Brig. The attitude of the Covenanters concerning civil government was crystallized by 1680, and was different from the attitude of 1660. In that year the Covenanters had expressed the recognition of the authority of the king, not in ecclesiastical matters, but in civil affairs. In 1680, their question was,

Can we any longer as Christians and freemen own the authority, even in civil things, of a king who has violated so flagrantly his coronation oath? . . . Has he not . . . forfeited all claim upon our allegiance, and by his reckless violation of the essential conditions of the social compact, set us free?¹⁶

Expressing these views in writing was the combined effort of Henry Hall of Haughhead and the famous Donald Cargill. The work which they attempted never was completed, however, for on June 3, 1680, while the two men were traveling together, they were attacked by royal soldiers near the town of Queensferry and in the scuffle Cargill escaped, but Hall was killed. The "scratch copy" of the document which became known thereafter as the Queensferry Paper was found on Hall and preserved. In this paper the king was disowned for having rejected God, monarchy was

¹⁶Hutchison, The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, p. 39.

repudiated as a prologue to tyranny, and a resolution was taken to set up a government according to Biblical commandments.¹⁷

Dovenanter sentiments were thus brought to attention through a very unfortunate turn of events; however, it was not long before they were officially announced to the public. The spirited young Richard Cameron, with twenty other men, drew up a document known as the Sanquhar Declaration, for it was posted in the market square of the town of Sanquhar on June 22, 1680. In briefer form it stated the same views as the Queensferry Paper; the difference was that this was a bold, open act, displayed for everyone to see, and to governmental minds, this constituted open treason.

Cargill, the older of the two men,¹⁸ undoubtedly looked upon Cameron as his successor to Covenanter leadership. But although he was well prepared for a long life of activity only a few weeks yet remained to him. Exactly one month after the Sanquhar Declaration, a small group of

¹⁷John Cunningham, The Church History of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1882), p. 122.

¹⁸The problem of Cargill's age is an interesting one. Some books state his birth date as 1619; other place it as early as 1610, thus making him an aged seventy years old at the time of the Queensferry Paper and the Sanquhar Declaration. But after a 25-year-long search into the Cargill family records, Featherstone Cargill (who died in 1960) concludes that 1627 is the correct date. The American authority on Cargill (R. B. Tweed of Geneva College) agrees that the later date is justified. This still makes him thirty years older than Cameron.

Covenanters was attacked at Ayrsmoss; they fought valiantly, but, outnumbered, the end was obvious. Cameron was one of the nine dead; his head and hands were put on display in Edinburgh; and the following Sunday, Cargill preached from the text, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

The barbarity of the government in dealing with the prisoners from Ayrsmoss and with the Covenanters during the ensuing few years bears a frightening resemblance to Nero's treatment of the early Christians, and Caligula seems almost mild in comparison. Yet although Cargill was executed a year after Cameron's death on July 27, 1681, the leaderless faithful continued to meet in their conventicles at increasing risk of their lives. In 1683 they welcomed as their leader the young James Renwick who had been present at Cargill's execution and had spent the intervening two years studying in Holland.

A year after Renwick's ministry began in Scotland, a group of men in England asked the Covenanters to help them in an effort to overthrow the government. Their reply--that they were willing to help overthrow tyranny but could have no association with malignants (i.e. Anglicans)--was found when its bearer, Gordon of Earlston, was arrested at Newcastle.¹⁹ The new wave of persecution which

¹⁹Hutchison, The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, p. 70.

broke out as a result of this was known as the "killing time" and spanned the last year of Charles II's reign and nearly all of James II's.

Of the many who died for the Covenant during those years, history records but little. Some of the martyrs did not have even a grave marker, but for those who did, the inscriptions thereon are probably the best remaining record. Let the following tell their own stories:

This Martyr was By PETER
INGLES Shot.
By birth a Tyger rather
than a Scot.
Who that his monstrous
Extract might be Seen
Cut off his head & kick't it
O'er the Green
Thus was that head which
Was to wear a Crown
A foot ball made by a profane
Dragoun.²⁰

HERE LYES JAMES
KIRKA MARTYR
SHOT DEAD UPON
THE SANDS OF D
UMFREIS FOR HIS
ADHEREING TO THE
WORD OF GOD AND
APPEARING FOR CHR
IST'S KINGLY GOVE
RNMENT IN HIS HO
USE AND THE COV
ENANTED WORK OF
REFORMATION AG
AINST TIRRRANIE
PERJURIE AND PRE
LACIE 1685 REV
12:11.²¹

²⁰James Gibson, Inscriptions on the Tombstones and Monuments Erected in Memory of the Covenanters, with Historical Introduction and Notes (Glasgow, n.d.), p. 130.

²¹Ibid., p. 211.

At Lagg and bloodie bruce command
 We were hung up by hellish hand
 And thus their furious rage to stay
 We died near Kirk of Irongray
 And now in peace sweet rest we take
 Once murdered for religion's sake.²²

When history does record something of these Covenanters, it all too nonchalantly speaks of their crudity their wild and fanatical outbursts in declaration and action, and their stubborn narrowness of view.²³ This paper will not whitewash their occasional sharp speech; their Apologetical Declaration of 1684 is scarcely a charitable expression of brotherly gentleness. Nor will it deny the unjustifiability of the murder of Peter Peirson, curate of Carsphairn. Yet how can history continue to heap the blame on these men for their isolated acts of unrighteousness and absolve their ruthless pursuers? James II made it clear that there would be no rest in the kingdom until

²²This one is probably in Gibson's book also, but was not found there. This author copied it from the tombstone itself and the first line was rather worn away.

²³For an especially unfriendly treatment, see Edwin Muir, John Knox, Portrait of a Calvinist (London, 1929). Hume Brown, History of Scotland (Cambridge, 1912), does not maliciously condemn the Covenanters as does Muir. He does not, however, place them in an altogether favorable light; he definitely shows his disapproval of the ministers who did not accept Charles' indulgences, and he excuses Charles' treatment of the Cameronians by saying that Charles was less barbaric to the people he murdered than the French government was to the people it murdered. William Croft Dickinson, A New History of Scotland: Scotland from the Earliest Times to 1603 (Edinburgh, 1961), deals with the early Presbyterians in a condescending manner. For example, he calls the Book of Discipline of 1560, a product of "devout imagination," thus casting a measure of doubt on the rationality of its authors. John Hill Burton, The History of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1873), doubts the veracity of the

all of southern and western Scotland was turned into a hunting field.²⁴ Perhaps when one lives for years with the inescapable knowledge that he is being followed by bloodhounds and merciless murderers, an occasional weakening of the charitable spirit is not altogether unwarranted. And when twenty-eight years of persecution, climaxed by the four-year killing time, came to a close, an estimated eighteen thousand Covenanters had been executed, imprisoned for life, exiled, drowned, shot without questioning in homes and fields--or died of exposure and starvation on the unfriendly moors.²⁵ In a less ferocious era the grim reality is easily obscured and misplaced sympathy is common.

But the killing time ended, and the Glorious Revolution accomplished, in part at least, that which Car-gill and Cameron had attempted eight years earlier. The relief that accompanied William III's accession to the throne is immeasurable, and one might expect the weary Covenanters to have accepted his terms unconditionally. By his "Revolution Settlement" laws were made against Popery and for the maintenance of the reformed faith, the Westminster Confession was adopted, Presbyterian government

story of the Wigtown martyrs, and justifies the government in its treatment of the Cameronians. (Vol. VII, p. 254 ff.)

²⁴Alexander Smellie, Men of the Covenant (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), pp. 384-400.

²⁵Ibid., p. 494. Statistics from John Howie, The Scots Worthies (Edinburgh, 1870).

and discipline were established, patronage was abolished, and the first meeting of the General Assembly was appointed to meet.²⁶ There were, however, major defects in the Settlement, the most odious to the Covenanters being the omission of a revocation of the Act Rescissory. For this reason, and for the reason that the king was still the head of the church, the strictest of the Covenanters, known as Cameronians, refused to participate in the General Assembly. And thus the ones who had won peace for Scotland, made possible the undeniable good of the Settlement, and achieved the political liberty which English-speaking countries still enjoy three centuries afterward were themselves disappointed, and chose to lead the lonely life of the "Praying Societies" withal in thankfulness, until the "acceptable year of the Lord" should come.

With intermittent leadership only, the Society people were little heard of for many years. Later, becoming officially known as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, they were organized into congregations, of which at present there remain but five, again confronted with the problem of inadequate leadership. A new chapter in the story of the society people can be started on the west side of the Atlantic, however, for it was to the new world that many of them came, and in the new world they have expanded.

²⁶ Alexander Smellie, Men of the Covenant (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), p. 505.

CHAPTER II

COLONIAL CONGREGATIONS

Scottish people, unwelcome in English projects of colonization, came slowly to the New World. In the 1680's during the Killing Time, many Covenanters escaped to Holland; only two groups actually attempted to settle in North America. One group, led by a certain George Scot, planned to settle in East Jersey, but because many of them, including Scot, died en route, the rest scattered to various places upon their arrival. Another attempt was made by Henry Erskine in South Carolina, but this group was attacked by the Spanish and the Indians and most of them eventually returned to Scotland.¹ In 1698 and 1699, the "Company of Scotland" (hoping to compete with the East India Company and other English merchant adventures) tried to organize a settlement at the isthmus of Darien, but with Spanish opposition, discontent among the leaders and colonists, a hostile climate, and poor communication between home and colony, it ended in miserable failure.²

¹David M. Carson, "History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America" (unpublished dissertation, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania), pp. 10-15.

²G. M. Waller, Samuel Vetch, Colonial Enterpriser (Chapel Hill: 1960), pp. 15-29.

Actually, most of the Scots who wanted to leave Scotland in the 1600's went to Ireland, and it was from these "Ulster Cameronians" that the American Covenanter church was formed.

From approximately 1720 to 1745, Irish Covenanters came to America for several reasons. In the first place, all Irish citizens were taxed to support the Anglican clergy, and quite naturally, the Covenanters refused. Secondly, absentee landowners in Ulster raised the rent during these years while at the same time, English legislation restricted any possible Irish prosperity. Meat, wool, and linen were forbidden to be exported.³ Obstructed both in religious and economic matters, numerous Covenanters sought opportunity in the colonies. With no plan for settling together, however, they scattered along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to the Carolinas, and west into the Appalachian Piedmont of Pennsylvania.

The greatest number of Covenanters settled in eastern Pennsylvania in the vicinity of Octorora, and it was to this group that Alexander Craighead came as minister in 1743.⁴ Craighead had come to New England in 1715 and

³Carson, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴The precise date is questionable. W. M. Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, p. 62, states that Craighead joined the Covenanters in 1743, whereas A Brief History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, published by the present Synod of the R.P.C., gives 1742 as the date. The discrepancy is probably due to the confusion over Craighead's voluntary separation from the Synod of Philadelphia and his official suspension.

joined the Synod of Philadelphia⁵ in 1724, being ordained in 1735 at Middle Octorora. Throughout the 1730's the dispute over subscription--which had begun decades earlier in Ireland over the problem of Semi-Arian infiltration in the Presbyterian Church--was becoming more serious.⁶ Craighead, an advocate of practical Methodism and an anti-subscriptionist, found himself nearly alone in the Presbytery of Donegal, which was the stronghold of the opponents of Methodism and the advocates of strict subscription.⁷ At

⁵This was a Presbyterian Synod, but not Reformed Presbyterian.

⁶The problem of subscription originated in 1693 when Parliament required all ministers in Scotland to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The General Assembly drew up a formula of subscription which was quite strict. When Irish ministers who had been in Scotland when this was done returned to Ireland, they hoped to establish as strong a church as Scotland had. However, since the State Church was Episcopal, not Presbyterian, it was actually impossible. Nonetheless, it created excitement which was intensified by the case of Thomas Emlyn, a pastor in the Presbytery of Dublin. Emlyn, after studying Sabellius, Arius, and Socinus, began to agitate against the orthodox teaching of the Trinity. Emlyn was dismissed by the Presbytery. But in England, when the same situation arose, the dispute in the General Meeting in London soon centered, not around the problem of dealing with Semi-Arianism, but whether or not a formula of subscription should be exacted from all ordained ministers, as had been done in Scotland but not in Ireland. This question was discussed in England, Ireland and Scotland for the next three decades, and ultimately the controversy spread to the colonies. When a case involving heresy arose, Craighead took the position of the non-subscriptionists--even though he was opposed to the heresy--and was suspended from Presbytery.

⁷New England Methodism arose from the preaching of Gilbert Tennent and Jonathan Edwards--and is not akin to the preaching of the Methodist Church of the mid-twentieth century. It was a system to give Biblical instruction in a methodical manner and to take minute care in admitting

the meeting of Synod in 1741, Craighead was accused of intrusion upon the congregation of another minister and, following a disorderly debate concerning Methodism and subscription, the Synod was split in two parties. With Craighead came John Cross who was suspended by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in 1742, and then continued an independent ministry, and David Alexander who was appointed by the Presbytery of Donegal to supply "the necessity of the Great Valley" in 1741 and was never head of again.⁸ Craighead, after failing to persuade the Presbytery of New Brunswick to adopt the Solemn League and Covenant, appealed to the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland for support, and at the same time prepared a paper defending his opinions. Under Craighead's leadership, the Octorora Covenanters met to renew the Covenants and to denounce the policy of George II.⁹ When the civil authorities of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, complained to the 1743 Synod of Philadelphia of Craighead's views concerning the Solemn League and Covenant, Synod agreed that:

. . . it is full of treason, sedition, and distraction, and grievous perverting of the sacred oracles to the ruin of all societies and civil government,

people to the Lord's Supper and in ordaining ministers. It was the training and ordaining of ministers which ultimately caused the rift in Presbytery, resulting in the question of Craighead's dismissal.

⁸C. A. Briggs, American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History (New York: 1885), p. 242.

⁹Ibid., p. 274.

and diametrically opposite to our religious principles. . . . And we hereby declare, that he (Craighead) hath been no member of our society for some time past, nor do we acknowledge him as such, though we cannot but heartily lament that any man that was ever called a Presbyterian, should be guilty of what is in this paper.¹⁰

By renewing the Covenants (in 1743) Craighead and the Covenanters showed their belief that the obligation of the covenants rested on them in America just as it had on their ancestors in Scotland. This was the problem of "descending obligation" which is still, in the twentieth century, an issue among Covenanters. To defend his position, Craighead wrote a paper entitled, "A Declaration, Protestation, and Testimony of a suffering Remnant of the Anti-Popish, Anti-Lutheran, Anti-Prelatick, Anti-Erastian, Anti-Latitudinarian, Anti-Sectarian true Presbyterian Church of Christ, in America." Since the Act of Settlement (1701) and the Act of Union (1707) required that the British monarch be of Anglican faith, these acts were in violation to the Solemn League and Covenant; hence Craighead's argument. In his history, Carson points out that Craighead was "unrealistic in complaining a century later that the English were not fulfilling the conditions of the Covenant."¹¹ But after Craighead's staunch stand on this point, one wonders why he left the Covenanter fellowship

¹⁰Ibid., p. 275. Quoted from Synod Records 1743, p. 165 but the original was not found by this author. It would be enlightening to see this in context.

¹¹Carson, op. cit., p. 31.

eight years later. For some unrecorded reason, he united with the Anti-Burgher Synod of the Associate Presbyterian Church of Scotland. In 1751, not willing to abandon the societies in the colonies, the Covenanters in Scotland sent the Reverend John Cuthbertson, who worked alone for twenty-two years in Pennsylvania and New York.¹²

In 1772, William Martin, a Reformed Presbyterian from Ireland, came to the colonies but settled in South Carolina, so could not be an immediate help to Cuthbertson. But in 1773 he was joined by Matthew Linn and Alexander Dobbin, who together constituted the first Reformed Presbytery in America on March 10, 1774, at Paxtang, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania.¹³ The Reformed Presbyterian denominations of the present day (the Synod and the Evangelical Synod) trace their organization from this date.

At the time of the organization of the Reformed Presbytery, the question of "descending obligation" of the Covenants reappeared. The presbytery (Cuthbertson, Dobbin, and Linn) agreed that the covenants were personal, not national, and that the only terms of communion insisted upon should be "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the approbation of the doctrines contained in the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Form of Church

¹²Glasgow, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Baltimore: 1888), p. 63.

¹³Ibid., p. 64.

Government, as agreeable to scripture."¹⁴ It was felt that Craighead had been mistaken in considering the colonies and Scotland as the same country. Thus, not requiring "descending obligation" the Reformed Presbytery was prepared to participate in the actions of the emerging nation, the United States of America.

From the termination of the French and Indian War in 1763 on, English-American relations were growing worse. The enforcement of the Navigation Acts, the Stamp Act, the Declaratory Act, the Tea Tax, the Quebec Act, and the Townshend Duties were all kindling for the fire of military revolution in Lexington and Concord in 1775. The Covenanters, by denouncing the policies of George II in 1743, had already shown their interest in government and it did not wane under the harsher rule of George III. This interest in government on the part of the Covenanters cannot be explained simply as the complaint of a malcontent element in society, but rather as their genuine concern for the ruling powers and their responsibility to a holy God as evidenced from the time of Rutherford's Lex Rex. The overbearing position of the British monarchy alienated the Covenanters from the Tory lines and it has even been said that "an unsound Whig made a poor Covenanter, and a poor Covenanter, and a good Covenanter made a loyal Whig."¹⁵

¹⁴Carson, op. cit., pp. 48-49, quoting from Findley, pp. 312-313.

¹⁵Glasgow, op. cit., p. 65.

Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian of the nineteenth century, records that Joseph Galloway, a Pennsylvania delegate to the Continental Congress and Prominent British sympathizer, "ascribed the revolt and revolution mainly to the action of the Presbyterian clergy and laity as early as 1764, when the proposition for a general synod emanated from a committee appointed for the purpose in Philadelphia."¹⁶ Hodge states that this was a great exaggeration and a mistake but that it indicates the close connection between the civil and religious part of the controversy. The first case in which the Covenanters themselves were engaged in anti-British activity was that of William Martin, the Covenanter pastor in South Carolina. He was thrown in prison for six months for "preaching rebellion against an unlawful and tyrannical king and inciting the people to rise up in arms against British oppression."¹⁷

Probably incited by this event and convinced by the Lexington and Concord skirmish of April, 1775 that reconciliation with Great Britain was now an impossibility, the ambitious Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of North Carolina, with Craighead as their leader, met in a sort of congress

¹⁶W. P. Breed, Presbyterians and the Revolution (Philadelphia: 1876), p. 48, quoting from Hodge. This does not, of course, refer to the Reformed Presbyterians since they were not yet organized, but is interesting in placing Presbyterians among the pro-Revolutionaries.

¹⁷Glasgow, op. cit., p. 68.

in Mecklenberg County. Here, in May, 1775, they drew up a document called the Mecklenberg Declaration, sometimes hailed as the First Declaration of Independence. The Declaration is as follows:

1. Resolved, That whosoever, directly or indirectly, abetted, or in any way, form or manner countenanced, the unchartered and dangerous invasion of our rights, as claimed by Great Britain, is an enemy to this country, to America, and to the inherent and inalienable rights of man.

2. Resolved, That we, the citizens of Mecklenburg county, do hereby dissolve the political bonds which have connected us to the mother country, and hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British Crown, and abjure all political connection, contract or association with that nation, who have wantonly trampled on our rights and liberties and inhumanly shed the blood of American patriots at Lexington.

3. Resolved, That we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people; are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the general government of the Congress; to the maintenance of which we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation and our lives, our fortunes and our most sacred honor.

4. Resolved, That as we now acknowledge the existence and control of no law or legal officer, civil or military, within this county, we do hereby ordain and adopt as a rule of life, all, each and every of our former laws, wherein, nevertheless, the Crown of Great Britain never can be considered as holding rights, privileges, immunities or authorities therein.

5. Resolved, That it is further desired that all, each and every military officer in this county is hereby reinstated in his former command and authority, he acting conformably to these regulations. And that every member present of this delegation shall henceforth be a civil officer, namely: A justice of the peace in the character of a 'committeeman,' to issue process, hear and determine all matters of controversy according to the said adopted laws, and to preserve peace, union and harmony in said county, and to use every exertion to spread the love of country and fire of

freedom throughout America, until a more general and organized government be established in this province.¹⁸

There have been many loyal and well-meaning friends of the Covenanters who, pointing out the similarities of the Mecklenberg Declaration and the Declaration of Independence, conclude that Jefferson borrowed extensively from the Covenanters' document for his own. Glasgow, the well-known Covenanter historian, states that Jefferson "searched for formulas for the National Declaration of Independence and used freely the ideas in the Mecklenberg Declaration."¹⁹ It is true that the Mecklenberg Declaration was delivered to the North Carolina delegates at the Continental Congress, but it would have been a strange if not an unwise move on their part to show it to the Congress leaders, inasmuch as the Congress was at that time almost unanimous in trying to keep peace with Britain. As late as August, 1775, Jefferson said, "I would rather be in dependence on Great Britain, properly limited, than on any nation on earth, or than on no nation."²⁰ The Mecklenberg affair would have been considered a hasty act. And further, its very validity has been attacked. In 1907, A. S. Sally, writing for the American Review, suggested that the so-called declaration "is in fact a forgery, or at least the

¹⁸Breed, op. cit., pp. 72-74.

¹⁹Glasgow, op. cit., p. 66.

²⁰Breed, op. cit., p. 77.

attempt of an old man to remember the wording of something written in his youth of which he had no copy."²¹ Sally said that a document entitled "Mecklenberg Resolves" was published in the South Carolina Gazette at Charleston on June 13, 1775. In the Resolves, it was declared that, "all Laws and Commissions confirmed by, or derived from the authority of the King or Parliament, are annulled and vacated, and the former civil constitution of these colonies for the present wholly suspended."²² It was, according to Sally, these resolves which were taken to Philadelphia. Whether or not it was entitled "Declaration" is not so important; the sentiment expressed was explosive enough.

The similarity in style of the Mecklenberg Resolves (or Declaration) and the Declaration of Independence does not in itself indicate that Jefferson borrowed from the earlier one, for the distinctive political phrases were standard for that day and can be found in many documents and speeches. If one wishes to credit the Covenanters with supplying the "formulas" for which Jefferson was seeking, it would be more nearly accurate to establish their origin not just one year prior to the National Declaration, but a century in advance. For it was the Queensferry Paper and the Sanquhar Declaration in which

²¹From a paper by Dr. Ray Wilcox of Geneva College, discussing an article by A. S. Sally, Jr., from the American Review, Volume XIII (October, 1907), 16-18.

²²Ibid.

these phrases first appear. Glasgow does mention the similarity of Jefferson's declaration to the Queensferry Paper, but the point should be stressed that it was this document that set the pattern for future political phraseology, not just the Mecklenberg Declaration that might have but most probably did not influence Jefferson.

A brief discussion of the Queensferry Paper is appropriate here since it contributes so much to the political foundations of our country. (The Sanquhar Declaration said, in briefer form, what the Queensferry Paper spelled out in detail.) The drama surrounding the discovery of the Queensferry Paper has already been told in Chapter I; the lasting influence of the paper has been described thus:

Rude and imperfect in structure, it was evidently the first draught of what was to have been afterwards more fully elaborated. But even in its unfinished form, the Queensferry Paper is a formidable and remarkable document. It speaks out plainly against the stream of defection of the time that neither minds by-past vows nor intends performance; it enumerates eight purposes actuating the intending subscribers, and rejects the king and those associated with him in government from being sovereign and rulers, declaring them to be no lawful rulers, and refusing them any willing obedience.²³

The part of the paper that was most heinous to the Stuarts was:

We do declare, that we shall set up over ourselves, and over what God shall give us power of, government and governors according to the Word of God;

²³C. G. McCrie, Scotland's Part and Place in the Revolution of 1688 (Edinburgh: 1888), p. 86.

that we shall no more commit the government of ourselves, and the making of laws for us, to any one single person, this kind of government being most liable to inconveniences, and aptest to degenerate into tyranny.²⁴

Both in outline and in content, the Declaration of Independence bears a striking resemblance to this paper; and the Declaration was no more palatable to the Hanovers than its predecessor had been to the Stuarts.

In his consideration of the Queensferry Paper, James Dodds states that it contains "the very pith of sound constitutional doctrine regarding both civil and ecclesiastical rights," and its conclusion "breathes the very soul of liberty."²⁵ One cannot help but notice the similar fervent tone in the words "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor" and "we bind and oblige ourselves to defend ourselves, and one another, in our worshipping of God, and in our natural, civil, and divine rights and liberties, till we shall overcome, or send them down under debate to posterity, that they may begin where we end." Save for the length of the statements, one might not know which belonged to which masterpiece.

The Covenanters of Mecklenberg County, North Carolina, may indeed have been the first actively to

²⁴The Queensferry Paper, quoted in Hetherington, History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: 1852), p. 108.

²⁵Dodds, Fifty Years Struggle, p. 260.

advocate separation from Britain, and if redicalism can briefly be defined as the desire for innovation, these Covenanters were radicals. But other Covenanters, in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, were not so hasty. At Hanna's Town in 1776 they resolved it their "duty to maintain and defend our just rights which with sorrow we have seen of late wantonly violated in many instances by a wicked ministry and a corrupt parliament . . ." and they stated "that we do not wish or desire any innovation but only that things may be restored to and go on in the same way as before the era of the Stamp Act. . . ." ²⁶ From the expressions of many men of the Revolutionary period, it is evident that numerous Americans had this same desire to resist innovation, to return to pre-Stamp Act conditions; and it was with this in mind that they went to war.

Whether the Covenanters in the Revolutionary War period were radical or conservative--indeed whether the entire war was a radical or conservative movement--depends on one's definition of those loosely-used words. But whichever word is applied to them, there can be no doubt that the Covenanters certainly had no intention of conserving the outrageous claims of the Stuart kings for the benefit of the Hanovers. They were radically opposed to dictatorial monarchy; conservatively in favor of colonial self-government.

²⁶Breed, op. cit., pp. 60-62.

With the end of the Revolutionary War came a period of hopefulness and a desire for the colonies to work together. The spirit of "confederation" was reflected in religious affairs as well as in political. In 1782 the Reformed Presbytery and the Associate Presbytery merged to form the Associate Reformed Church. Taking part in this merger were the three ministers of the Reformed Presbytery (Cuthbertson, Dobbin, and Linn), but they by no means carried their entire congregations with them. Many Covenanters objected to the "loose" theology of the merged church which included singing hymns, open communion, abolishing fast days, free exchange of pulpits with other denominations, and agitation for union with the Presbyterian Church.²⁷

In 1789, the Reverend James Reid from Scotland came to examine the condition of the Covenanters who had refused to enter the merger of 1782. When he returned to Scotland he sent the Reverends James McGarragh and William King to South Carolina, and with William Martin they formed a "Committee of the Scottish Presbytery."²⁸ In 1793, Mr. King had an interview with the Reverend James McKinney, a member of the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland, who had come temporarily to New York. McKinney's convictions, his wisdom and his character made him a successful preacher,

²⁷Glasgow, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁸Ibid., p. 76.

and devoting himself to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, he greatly encouraged and strengthened the Covenanters of New York and Pennsylvania.²⁹ When the New York Covenanters requested in 1798 that McKinney's connection with his pastorate in Ireland be dissolved in order that he might settle permanently among them, he accepted the invitation and took charge of the congregations of Galway and Duanesburg³⁰--the latter of which is the oldest Reformed Presbyterian Church still in existence in the United States today. These churches he served until 1802 when he accepted a call to South Carolina where he died the following year. McKinney will be remembered as one of the scholars of the Church in the early United States, as his work entitled Rights of God is a masterful combination of theological insight and scholarship. It has been lamented that two other works, Rights of Christ as Mediator and Rights of Men, were lost at the time of his death.³¹

The Reformed Presbytery which had lost its distinctive organization at the time of the merger of 1782 was not reestablished until 1798. The "Committee of the Scottish Presbytery" which had been organized in 1789 was constituted a Presbytery in subordination to the Scottish

²⁹Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 132.

³⁰Ibid., p. 133.

³¹Glasgow, op. cit., p. 77. A copy of the Rights of God can be found at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary, 7418 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Presbytery. But McKinney, who disapproved of the method of performing judicial transactions by a committee, and at so great a distance from the parent judicatory, urged that independent jurisdiction be given to the church as soon as possible.³² The Reformed Presbytery of the United States of North America was formally constituted in Philadelphia early in 1798. Several young men were licensed to preach and subsequently ordained to the ministry. The extent of their work is almost unbelievable in that day of dependable means of transportation: each of them traveled at least a thousand miles, and many of them two thousand in less than a year.³³ The fruits of their labors became visible in following years.

During the two decades following the Treaty of Paris, the American government was taking form. The choice of organization was that of a confederation of independent states or a constitutional republic. With the failure of the Articles of Confederation, the second alternative was adopted. And with respect to the relationship between church and state in the new country, C. A. Briggs says that "the American Presbyterians had advanced to a doctrine of toleration beyond anything recognized elsewhere in the world; to the mutual recognition of the rights of all men to the full and free exercise of their religion under

³²Reformation Principles Exhibited, pp. 135-36.

³³Ibid., p. 137.

the protection, but not under the control or direction of the civil government."³⁴ Covenanters, or Presbyterian, influence may indeed have been at work in the minds of the men at the Constitutional Convention. The failure of the Articles of Confederation has been ascribed to diminishing enthusiasm for the views of Locke and Jefferson, and the gathering of the Constitutional Convention to the increasing awareness of the necessity of bringing the excesses of a democratic revolution to an end.³⁵ The greatest advocates of "democracy" in 1776--Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine--were noticeably absent from the Convention, and the final count shows that only eight men signed both documents. C. G. Singer writes that the membership of the Philadelphia Convention was more conservative, politically and theologically, than that of the Continental Congress of 1776, and that "the Convention of 1787 displayed a consciousness of the meaning of the doctrine of sin and was far less given to illusions about the perfectibility of man and the inevitability of progress."³⁶

That the membership of the two congresses differed so greatly is due, according to Singer, to the fact that

³⁴Briggs, op. cit., p. 355.

³⁵C. G. Singer, A Theological Interpretation of American History (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), pp. 42-45.

³⁶Ibid., p. 45.

the basic philosophies of the two documents were not compatible. Democratic radicalism was waning, and Singer asserts that:

. . . liberalism [up to the present day] has been aware of the gulf which exists between Jefferson's American Dream and the Constitution; there has been, in liberal movements from the time of Jefferson to our own day, a basic hostility to the Constitution and a continuing desire to remake the government under the Constitution into something that more nearly conforms to that political pattern implied in the Declaration of Independence.³⁷

It does seem to be the case that at the present time there is a "remaking of the government" with certain liberal efforts to change the Constitution, but it is hardly in the direction of conforming to the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson believed in states' rights and a minimal control by the central government; the movement today is toward a stronger central government. Covenanters in the 1790's could more easily be found in the ranks of the Democratic-Republicans than among the Federalists, and although there are exceptions, most Reformed Presbyterians of today favor the Republican states' rights emphasis.

The problem faced by the American Covenanters was not at first one of states' rights but rather of allegiance to the Constitution itself. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Covenanters had felt that the constitution of Great Britain was immoral, and to an immoral establishment they would not give allegiance. They

³⁷Ibid., pp. 43-44.

furthermore refused to pray for the prosperity of the system which they really desired to see removed.³⁸ The American Declaration of Independence by attributing the existence and preservation of mankind to the Creator was not considered immoral, and thus they hailed it as a firm foundation for the new country. In 1777, under Cuthbertson's leadership, Reformed Presbyterians promised fidelity to the new country. So persuaded were they of the acceptability of this first document of the United States that Glasgow asserts bluntly, "The Declaration of Independence was right"--but then he continues--"but the Constitution of the United States was wrong."³⁹ The reason is that the Constitution does not expressly mention the government's subordination to Christ's kingship. And disappointment in the new Constitution led the Covenanters to affirm that the Declaration of Independence was a national statement of one important principle for which all Covenanters contended: "we are not bound to own, as God's ordinance, every one without exception, who may providentially have power in his hands."⁴⁰

From here, the basis of political dissent shifted from the Solemn League and Covenant and the Revolution Settlement to the secular nature of the American

³⁸Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 122.

³⁹Glasgow, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴⁰Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 126.

Constitution. Carson states, "This marked a new intellectual beginning for the church and was the answer to the question of the relationship of the Scottish church to the United States that satisfied the remnant of the society people."⁴¹

⁴¹Carson, op. cit., p. 59.

CHAPTER III

CONSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT

With the completion of the United States Constitution and Washington's wise presidential leadership, it began to appear that the young country might survive after all. The rigors of war and the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation had taught much to the political leaders of early America; their success in remaining aloof from British and French problems and their ability to put down the Whisky Rebellion confirmed their strength and wisdom in positions of responsibility; their adherence to the Constitution assured political stability.

When the United States Constitution was written and ratified, the Reformed Presbyterian Church as an organized body had temporarily ceased to exist. Only the scattered individuals who refused to join the merged church of 1782 still upheld the principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of 1774. But when a Reformed Presbytery was once again organized in 1798, it was necessary for it to take a definite stand concerning the government of the nation in which its members now lived.

Glasgow states that the Covenanters of 1798 were

not in the same political situation as those of 1774. The ratified Constitution was faulty and its objectionable features, recognized by the new presbytery, were as follows: "wilfull omission of all reference to God the Author, Christ the King, and the Word of God as the Supreme Law of nations and civil government; sanction and protection of human slavery, and other permissions of evil."¹ For these reasons the Church took and maintained a position of practical dissent from the Constitution.

In 1809, when the first Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church was constituted, the delegates ratified all the deeds of the Reformed Presbytery, among which was the Declaration and Testimony of 1806. A committee had been appointed in 1802 to draw up a Testimony for the church; of this committee the Rev. Alexander Mc Leod was chairman. Mc Leod, who had been won to the principles of the Covenanters by James McKinney shortly after his arrival in the colonies in 1796, became pastor of the church in New York City, and distinguished himself as a leader and scholar in the denomination. In May, 1806, the Declaration and Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America was read and unanimously adopted.²

Concerning the "Right of Dissent from a Constitution of Civil Government" the Declaration states:

¹Glasgow, History, p. 79.

²Ibid., p. 81.

It is the duty of Christians, for the sake of peace and order, and in humble resignation to God's good providence, to conform to the common regulations of society in things lawful; but to profess allegiance to no constitution of government which is in hostility to the kingdom of Christ, the Head of the³ church, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.

The Declaration further condemns two errors:

That a constitution of government, which deprives unoffending men of liberty and property, is a moral institution, to be recognized as God's ordinance; . . . That it is lawful to profess or swear allegiance to an immoral constitution of Civil Government.⁴

The "immorality" here referred to, with respect to the United States Constitution, applies primarily to its silence on the matter of slavery. As long as the United States government sanctioned slavery, either tacitly or openly, the Covenanters could not give their allegiance to it. Their position on slavery had been clarified in 1800 when it was stated: "No slaveholder should be allowed the communion of the church." At that time, James McKinney and S. B. Wylie went to South Carolina to tell the Covenanters there to emancipate their slaves, with the result that "3000 guineas" worth of slaves were granted freedom.⁵

The other problem of constitutional immorality lies in the absence of the formal recognition of the sovereignty of Christ over the nation and the public acknowledgement

³Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 120.

⁴Ibid., pp. 119 and 123.

⁵Glasgow, op. cit., p. 79.

of the authority of the laws of God. In contrast with the charters of the colonies this defect in the Constitution is quite obvious, and even today proposals are made to amend the Constitution by a formal acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty. But whether this defect prevents an individual from participating in civil affairs is another matter. In New Testament times, Jews and Christians were not condemned for being citizens of the Roman Empire and participating in governmental affairs, even though the Empire was built on paganism. A government, with its establishment of law and order, is an instrument of "common grace," while the church, designed for holy worship, is an instrument of "special" or "redemptive grace." The insistence on formal and public recognition of Christ's laws is discouragingly reminiscent of the Covenanters' demand that Charles II acknowledge and abide by the Solemn League and Covenant. The question becomes one not of governmental immorality, but of governmental hypocrisy.⁶

Glasgow further raises objections to the Constitution

⁶Some people have tried to build a case for the mortality of the Constitution by saying that because the laws of the land, with the whole tone and spirit of the document, are ethically "Christian," therefore it IS Christian. But although the United States was founded with "Christian overtones," the argument is, nonetheless, evading the issue.

Another argument is that because the Constitution uses the date A.D. 1787, it therefore acknowledges its submission to Christ. In light of the French Revolution which annihilated even such a small hint of Christianity as this, it is an interesting point, but scarcely contributive to the issue.

by declaring "historically, philosophically and scripturally untrue" the preamble which says, "We, the people of the United States . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." He explains that "the Constitution in all its essential elements was in existence before the document thus called was penned; constitutions are not ordained of men, but grow; and the Scripture affirms that the powers that are legitimate powers at all, are ordained of God."⁷ The Scripture here referred to is undoubtedly Romans 13:1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." The present study, not being one of exegesis, must not be so bold as to attempt a definitive exposition of the verse; however, the difference between the biblical terminology "powers that be" and Glasgow's statement "powers that are legitimate powers at all" is apparent. Scripture further clarifies this point in Colossians 1:16: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him." This train of argument is, of course, the one misconstrued by the Stuart dynasty in order to prove its "divine right" theory. But in his intense desire to show this theory false, Glasgow has gone

⁷Glasgow, op. cit., p. 54.

to the other extreme and said that only the "legitimate" powers are ordained of God. If by "legitimate" he means those governments which acknowledge the authority of the law of God and the supreme kingship of Christ, he is at one blow destroying the right to existence of every earthly government, with the possible exception of King David's reign over Israel (and as previously mentioned is in conflict with the New Testament view of the Roman Empire). Glasgow emphasizes the point that government is ordained by God but not individual governments. Nonetheless, Scripture itself uses the words powers, thrones, dominions, principalities, not in the abstract, but in concrete, individualistic terminology. And it should be clear that although powers are ordained of God, yet it is the people who must organize these powers. This was the position taken by the Covenanters faced with political problems in Stuart England. And the most thorough treatment of the Covenanter political position is the 600-page volume by Samuel Rutherford entitled Lex Rex. Although Rutherford is probably best known for his highly inspirational letters, his Lex Rex is not so spiritually inspiring. It has about as much emotion in it as the multiplication table. This dry remark can be made into a compliment by adding that it is also as logical as the multiplication table. Several statements from the book should be sufficient to satisfy the student who may wonder why Glasgow mentions neither Rutherford nor Lex Rex in his history.

The power of creating a man a king is from the people.
 If the king have not the consent of the people, he is an usurper, for we know no external lawful calling that kings have now, or their family to the crown, but only the call of the people. The law is not the king's own, but given to him in trust.
 Power is not an immediate inheritance from heaven, but a birthright of the people borrowed from them. They may let it out for their good, and resume it when a man is drunk with it.⁸

The statement, "We the people . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution" is not anti-Covenanter at all. And this is what the authors of the Declaration and Testimony of 1806 realized. Their greatest objection to the Constitution lay not in the preamble but in its protection of slavery. This had come about because the delegates to the Constitutional Convention from the northern commercial states wanted the government to have full power to regulate interstate and foreign commerce. The South, however, asked that all commercial regulations receive the consent of two-thirds of the Senate rather than a simple majority. Since the very survival of the South depended on their export of tobacco, naval stores, and other staple crops, and their import of slaves, they were eager to preserve some control over export taxes. A compromise therefore was made prohibiting taxes on exports and guaranteeing non-interference with the slave trade for twenty years and granting to the North their desire for a simple majority vote to pass acts

⁸Quotations from Lex Rex, chosen by Dodds, Fifty Years' Struggle, p. 20.

regulating commerce.⁹ In 1808, the twenty year ban on interference with the slave trade was over, and Congress declared it closed and illegal. Thus by the time that Madison was elected president of the United States, no real barrier prohibited the Covenanters from giving their allegiance to the government.

When the War of 1812 broke out, the Covenanters were ready to defend their country. Because they had held themselves apart from the political life up to that time, and because many people suspected them to be enemies of the nation, the Synod of 1812 made the following declaration:

This Synod, in the name of its constituent members and of the whole Church which they represent, declare that they approve of the Republican form of civil order of the United States, and the several States; that they prefer this nation and its government to any other nation and government; that they will support to the utmost the independence of the United States, and the several States, against all foreign aggressions and domestic factions, and disclaim all allegiance to any foreign jurisdiction whatsoever.¹⁰

And further, Covenanters were to take the following oath:

I, _____, do solemnly declare, in the name of the Most High God, the Searcher of hearts, that I abjure all foreign allegiance whatsoever, and hold that these States, and the United States, are, and ought to be, sovereign and independent of all other nations and governments, and that I will promote the best interests of this empire, maintain its independence, preserve its peace, and

⁹Richard Hofstadter, William Miller, and Daniel Aaron, The American Republic (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1959), p. 241.

¹⁰Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 183.

support the integrity of the Union, to the best of my power.¹¹

In Reformation Principles Exhibited, the opinion of an Attorney General of the United States is given, stating that this pledge "embraced all the essential provisions of the oath of allegiance prescribed by Congress, and more emphatically than it does."¹²

Since this oath constituted a change in the accepted political sentiments of the Covenanters, Gilbert McMaster, Synod's first moderator, thought it proper to offer an explanation of it. R. W. Chestnut in his Historical Sketch of the Reformed Presbyterian Church gives the entire explanation, the core of which is as follows:

Examine the import of this document. This Synod, it says, in the name of its constituent members, and of the whole church, which they represent, declare that they support, to the utmost, the independence of the United States, and the several States, against all foreign aggressions, and domestic factions, etc. What is a State? It is neither the soil nor the individuals, as such, that occupy the soil. IT IS THE BODY POLITIC; the community under their Constitution and laws. It is the Constitution and constitutional laws, expressed or understood, that binds the people into a community, and thus forms a State. Abolish these bonds, and there is no body politic; no state. The sovereignty or independence of the several States is recognized in this deed of the church, and a solemn pledge is given to support to the utmost, the several States in this independent sovereignty which they possess. This is much stronger and more explicit than the LEGAL oath of allegiance required.¹³

¹¹Ibid., pp. 183-84.

¹²Ibid., p. 184.

¹³R. W. Chestnut, A Brief Sketch of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (Duanesburg, New York: 1945), p. 4.

Dr. McMaster continued by pointing out that the Federal Constitution constitutes the United States, which as a country was really organized by action of the Continental Congress in 1774. "Take away the Constitution" reasons McMaster, "and you will find the several States each in full possession of its primitive sovereignty, with all its prerogatives, but there will be no United States, no Federal government, no united Empire to which an oath of allegiance could be given."¹⁴ This oath, then, is the obligation to support the Constitution in its true spirit and interest, as it is that which gives existence to the Union, in its present form, which holds the States in union, and without which the Union must cease. Since Covenanter opposition to the Constitution rested mainly on the question of its morality or immorality, McMaster made a syllogism out of the problem:

To no immoral government may an oath of allegiance be given.
 But an oath of allegiance may be given to the United States government.
 Therefore the government is not immoral.¹⁵

The change from a position of political dissent to one of cooperation was not a move lightly taken. But once taken, it was defended and promoted. The extent of Covenanter support of the country was well displayed in a series of "Discourses on the War" by Alexander McLeod. These discourses (concerning the War of 1812) have been

¹⁴Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵Ibid.

claimed by their supporters to be "by far the ablest defense of the justice and necessity of that war which appeared from the press, whether in papers of state or in other forms."¹⁶ Thus we see the Covenanters in 1812, in pulpit and publication alike, defending the United States, which, as a body politic, is constituted, as any nation can only be, by its own constitution.

Through the Synods of 1818 and 1819 matters of ecclesiastical importance were resolved with near unanimity. Articles for the Testimony of the Church, a volume to present the position of the Church to the general public, included "The Directories," by John Black, the "Book of Discipline" and "Form of Covenanting" by Alexander McLeod, "Form of Church Government" by J. R. Willson, and "Forms of Process" by Gilbert McMaster. It was an "era of good feeling" in the church as well as in the government. But as the "good feelings" in the country were only a prologue to tariff and panic, so these years of apparent harmony gave way to disruption in the church.

The years building up to and including 1833 constitute a chapter in church history that all Reformed Presbyterians would prefer to see closed and sealed. For the disruption of 1833 caused only sorrow, resulted in the long-range weakening of the church, and nearly a century and a half later, the wound is not yet healed. A breach

¹⁶Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 185.

so shameful would rather be forgotten, but a breach which tears sinew, bone, and marrow apart cannot be glossed over in honest historical research.

The dispute began when, in 1821, a letter was received at Synod from Mr. James Willson of Kaskaskia, Illinois. He asked for information concerning the law of the church in civil affairs, especially the matter of sitting on juries. The Testimony of 1806 had stated that "sitting on juries in the civil courts of the United States, or in any State, is inconsistent with the Testimony."¹⁷ Willson probably wondered if the oath of 1812 had changed this stipulation. The reply that he received stated "that no connection with the laws, the offices, or the order of the State is prohibited by the Church except what truly involves immorality."¹⁸ Glasgow, who persistently maintains that the entire government is immoral, says that this statement of 1821 is no different from that of 1806. He would prefer to have it read: "all connection with the laws, the offices, and the order of the State is prohibited by the Church." The two statements, to Glasgow, are synonymous. But to the men who had guided the church through the changes of 1812, the two statements were not synonymous, and when a question arose concerning it, they gave a formal reply in Synod in 1825:

Some misunderstanding having occurred relating to

¹⁷Glasgow, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁸Ibid.

the meaning of the act passed at our last session respecting serving on juries, the Synod passed the following resolution: 'Resolved, That this Synod never understood any act of theirs relative to their members sitting on juries as contrary to the old common law of the Church on these subjects.'¹⁹

The old common law had prohibited, and still did prohibit, allegiance to an immoral government, but since the oath of 1812 was permitted, the United States government should no longer have been considered to be immoral. However, there were some who objected, preferring to maintain a position of political dissent. Those who did--and still do--would agree with the following argument:

Although technically quite correct as a statement of the church's position, this statement [i.e. the statement of 1821] seemed to remove jury duty from the list of those activities absolutely prohibited. More significantly, it shifted the burden of proof: as Two Sons of Oil stated the case, anyone who wished to engage in any political activity had to prove that he was not thereby 'homologating the illegitimate authority of the government'; this statement implied, on the other hand, that if the church wished to prohibit any activity, it must prove that it 'truly involved immorality.' This shift is important in assessing the changing attitude of the church.²⁰

After two committees (in 1830 and 1831) failed to produce any conclusive statements agreeable both to the dissenters and the non-dissenters, it was resolved:

. . . that this Synod [1831] recommend that the points of difference on the application of our principles to the civil institutions of the United States be discussed through the medium of the American Christian Expositor, under the head of

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 85-86.

²⁰D. M. Carson, History, p. 96.

'Free Discussions,' and that every member of Synod have full liberty to avail himself of this vehicle.²¹

In April, 1832, at the meeting of the Eastern Sub-ordinate Synod, a paper concerning the church's relationship to the government was read and adopted, after (Glasgow relates) "many malicious paragraphs were expunged."²² The paper, by S. B. Wylie, actually contained two paragraphs denying the necessity for political dissent, and was approved without those two paragraphs. Wylie stated that it was "susceptible of demonstration that since the commencement of Christianity, no government on earth has had a fairer claim to recognition as the ordinance of God, than that of these United States."²³ Wylie pointed to the "recognition of natural rights, the protection of person, property, and religion, guaranteed by these institutions of the land, and the provision for self-regeneration contained in the instruments" as evidence of the absence of anything "positively immoral" in the constitution.²⁴ But although Synod disapproved of these statements, Wylie proceeded to publish the paper in entirety in the "Free Discussions." Ministers who disapproved both of the government and of the "Free Discussions" called a pro re nata meeting in November, 1832, at which time the Clerk of Synod and five other pastors were suspended. The six suspended men (including Wylie, of course) were accused of

²¹Glasgow, op. cit., pp. 88-89. ²²Ibid., p. 92.

²³Carson, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁴Ibid.

1. Following divisive courses. 2. Contempt of the authority of Synod. 3. Error in doctrine. 4. Abandonment of the Testimony of the Church. 5. Slandering Synod and its members. The men were cited to appear before the regular meeting of the Eastern Subordinate Synod in April, 1833, and answer the charges in the libel. Among the accused was Dr. Alexander McLeod, the author of the oath of 1812. Recognizing the danger of the pro re nata meeting, he warned the men that their actions would lead to division in the church. He himself was spared the agonies of 1833, however, for after a full life of dedicated service to his Lord, he died in February of that fateful year. But his warnings went unheeded, and at the April meeting of the Eastern Subordinate Synod, the five men were formally suspended from the ministry and privileges of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Pastors throughout the country hoped that harmony would be restored in the August meeting of General Synod. But when the moderator of the Synod of 1831 (S. W. Crawford) rose to give the opening sermon, the men of the Eastern Subordinate Synod refused to recognize him since he was one of the five suspended pastors, and they called on his alternate to present the opening address. At this point, one of the pro re nata men rose and proclaimed himself Clerk of Synod in the place of Dr. John Black, while another rose and announced himself as moderator. Tempers flared, hot words were hurled from one side to the other, and city police were called in to settle the

confusion. The pro re nata men and their sympathizers withdrew from Synod, elected John Cannon moderator, and constituted "Synod." The pastors remaining in the original Synod (actually a minority, ministerially, but representing half the total membership of the church) requested those who withdrew to return. When they refused, states Reformation Principles Exhibited,

. . . the whole subject of the pro re nata doings was, by a report of the Eastern Subordinate Synod, brought before the Supreme Judicatory and, after a very full discussion and examination, was unanimously condemned. Those engaged in that evil work having left us, by their own act made the separation, and Synod declared them to be no longer in their connection, and ordered their names to be stricken from the roll of their members.²⁵

From the other point of view, Glasgow records that,

It is not customary for majorities to secede, especially when they are in the right, but because of the peculiar circumstances of this case, and for the sake of peace, the majority manifested the Christian spirit and withdrew from the brethren who were walking disorderly. . . . The misguided brethren set up an independent Synod and styled it that of the 'Reformed Presbyterian Church.'²⁶

Thus was effected the most lamentable separation in the church's history, a divorce which has caused unmeasurable sorrow to the most dedicated of the children to the present day.

²⁵Reformation Principles Exhibited, pp. 195-96.

²⁶Glasgow, op. cit., p. 96.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENTS TO DATE

After relating many of the troubles which beset the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Matthew Hutchison states in his History that "this branch of the church had become a very small body, destined apparently to speedy extinction."¹ Had Hutchison been present at the Synod meetings in 1953, he would have been convinced that his statement (except perhaps for the word "speedy") was correct. For the Synod's committee on the "Signs of the Times" reported that:

There has been a trend in our church, and this trend, if we translate it rightly, points to an end of our church as such. When we divided from the other branch of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, our part was larger than the 'Old Lights.' But now, the 'Old Lights' are four and a half times larger than we, and the 'Old Lights' themselves have steadily declined. We need not go on to tell that we are small and grow smaller almost by the hour. These are the signs of the times of our church.²

The members of the Synod of 1953 desired above all to remedy the desperate situation. Exhortations to renewed

¹Hutchison, The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Appendix, p. 411.

²Synod Minutes, 1953, p. 10.

fervor in prayer and redoubled efforts in evangelization were proper suggestions, but little enthusiasm was generated. The Synod of 1956 heard the last report of the Committee on the Signs of the Times. Renewed vigor appeared only in 1958, not from within, but from the possibility of growth by merging with another denomination which was quite alive and enthusiastic. But the decline of the church did not happen overnight; nor could it be cured overnight. To ascertain the real weakness of that dedicated group, it is necessary to follow the maze of events from 1833 up to the present day.

The official publication of General Synod³ until 1868 was the Banner of the Covenant⁴ published by George H. Stuart, who was also the Treasurer for the foreign mission board. A brief report of the condition of the church in 1858 accounts for seventy-three congregations and mission stations, a very active denomination.⁵

The first foreign missionary project undertaken by

³In 1821 when Synod became a delegated body, it took the name General Synod. After the split of 1833, both sides continued to use that name until in 1841 the Old Lights chose to use again the title "Synod." Many Old Lights feel that this name gives them priority of claim to continuity from the Synod of 1809, but it seems that continuity depends not so much on name as on interpretation of the issues of 1812, discussed in the previous chapter.

⁴Very few copies of the Banner of the Covenant are still available. One set is in the possession of Mr. Chalmers Elder of Darlington, Pennsylvania, but due to lack of time, this author was not able to use it much.

⁵R. W. Chestnut, Historical Sketch, p. 8.

the church was in India. The Rev. Dr. J. R. Campbell left Philadelphia on November 9, 1835, and after one year and one day of travel, he arrived at Saharunpore (Saharanpur), Northern India. During the next twenty years a school, a seminary, an orphan home, and several congregations were founded by Dr. Campbell. He was untiring in his labours in spite of his personal sorrow in the deaths of his wife and five children. Other workers came to help and by 1862 when Dr. Campbell died, a growing presbytery was in full operation.⁶

In the United States in 1862, Civil War was raging and the church was confronted with a different type of mission challenge. Through the middle decade of the nineteenth century the slavery issue was threatening to break open the chasm that had been forming in the country since the tariff disputes of earlier years. The slavery argument was heard not only in business circles but in churches as well. In the 1840's the Presbyterian Church split and a Free Presbyterian Church was organized.⁷ The Southern Presbyterian Church as well as some Methodist and Baptist groups also were testimonies to sectional diffraction. The Reformed Presbyterian Church did not split, however,

⁶C. G. Scott, History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Together with a Report of its Missionary Operations in India (Philadelphia: 1894), pp. 8-11.

⁷Chalmers Elder, article on the origin of the Free Presbyterian Church, whose congregation in Darlington, Pennsylvania merged with the R. P. C. in 1868.

for pastor and laity alike were united in their condemnation of the moral evil. Covenanter homes frequently served as stations on the Underground Railroad. And with the emancipation, the Reformed Presbyterian Church took an active part in the welfare of the freedmen. A mission school was organized in Alexandria, Virginia, and in 1867 it reported two hundred day students and fifty night students, for adult evening education was already very popular in those days.⁸ Liberal theologians seem unaware of the integrational action of the conservative churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of the Civil War era not only set up schools to educate the freedmen, but welcomed them to the fellowship of the church. By 1867 a Negro had been ordained a ruling elder in one church and "occupied with credit a seat in our highest ecclesiastical judicatory as a representative from one of our Presbyteries."⁹

Yet however worthy and ambitious the undertakings of the active little church, there was one shadow in the sky, a perhaps unrecognized portent of future problems. Finances for the support of the freedmen's missions were not adequately forthcoming and pleas were raised for greater giving.¹⁰

⁸Advocate, 1867, June, pp. 179-181.

⁹Advocate, July, 1867, p. 199, quoted from a letter of our Synod to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

¹⁰Advocate, July, 1867.

In 1868, another of the unfortunate and very complicated problems arose which resulted in the disruption of the church and undoubtedly contributed to its decline. One is tempted to begin an explanation of the problem with the doctrinal issue of exclusive Psalmody as it involved George Stuart, for it was on this point that most of the discussion pivoted. This will be discussed later, however, for in order to understand the depth of the rift, the matters of Synodical delegation and ministerial licensure in Philadelphia Presbytery must be understood.

Two young men, W. J. Chambers and Robert E. Thompson were licensed to preach by Philadelphia Presbytery, contrary to the wishes of two of the most eminent members of that presbytery, David Steele and S. W. Crawford. The commission to examine Thompson met in Dr. Steele's church but adjourned to a private home. Although the committee reported the examination to be "satisfactory" they had to require him to "enter into engagements to endeavor conformity to the usages of our church"--which, as Dr. Crawford remarked, was a strange and useless requirement of a thoroughly orthodox student of divinity in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.¹¹

The reason why Crawford and Steele opposed Thompson was that he did not adhere to exclusive Psalmody which

¹¹Minutes of General Synod, 1867, p. 260.

was the official position of the church. And for the same reason, they opposed the licensing of Chambers. As the Synod of 1867 approached, each presbytery had to elect its delegates, as had been the practice since 1821. Some ministers had consistently opposed the delegation system, as for example, the esteemed Dr. Samuel Wylie, who refused to take his seat in Synod on the ground of being a delegate, while claiming it as being a minister of the church.¹² But as the practice of delegation continued, Philadelphia Presbytery always sent the largest possible delegation.¹³ Suddenly, in 1867, they decided to send a small delegation, elected by secret ballot, a practice uncommon for many years. Drs. Steele and Crawford were excluded, as was Nevin Woodside, co-editor of the Advocate with Dr. Steele. Nonetheless, the three men were admitted to seats as consultative members.¹⁴

Concerning the licensure of Mr. Chambers, Synod ruled that:

. . . inasmuch as a diversity of views and of practice has prevailed for some time past on the subject of Psalmody; in view of this, Synod do not

¹²Minutes of General Synod, 1867, p. 259.

¹³Minutes of Synod, 1823, p. 133. The following resolution was passed: "The each Presbytery shall have the right of sending two ministers and as many ruling elders, and that the ratio of increase of the number of delegates be, until further order be taken on the subject, two ministers and as many ruling elders, for every three ministers of which the Presbytery consists."

¹⁴Minutes, 1867, p. 200.

require that the licensure of Mr. Chambers be revoked, but that he be retained in the service of the church, and following such things as make¹⁵ for the purity and peace of our portion of Zion.

How this ruling was accepted remains to the writer a mystery, for Reformation Principles Exhibited, a subordinate standard of the church at that time, states clearly that "The Book of Psalms . . . to the exclusion of all imitations and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship."¹⁶ Synod decided, however, that Thompson would be re-examined and a commission was appointed for that purpose. Crawford and Steele requested that they, along with any who wished to join them, be set off as a new Presbytery, to be called the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia. This petition was granted.

While these explosive matters were taking place, and the attention of most was drawn to them, another pastor, Dr. Douglas, presented a paper in regard to G. H. Stuart whom he charged with using an unauthorized Psalmody. Because the other matters took precedence, this paper was tabled and then withdrawn.¹⁷

Throughout the ensuing year, articles concerning exclusive Psalmody appeared in the Advocate. An article "What Manner of Song Shall We Sing?" by J. G. W.(ylie) expressed a desire for the entire church to unite in singing

¹⁵Minutes, 1867, p. 223.

¹⁶Reformation Principles Exhibited, p. 94.

¹⁷Minutes, 1867, pp. 205 and 223.

Psalms and says:

It is not disputed that the converted sinner should be supplied with some suitable matter of song; the point of disagreement is, simply, whether God or man shall be allowed to make this provision. . . . God made the Psalms, man makes the hymns. Which does the better work? 'What is good the Lord shall give.'¹⁸

When Synod met in May, 1868, Dr. Steele was elected moderator.¹⁹ George H. Stuart was the center of attention. As treasurer of the Board of Foreign Missions, he had served the church well, and was highly respected. But his views concerning exclusive Psalmody and close communion had changed through the years, and he no longer agreed with the official position of the church. That he once had agreed with the position of exclusive Psalmody is apparent from an article in defense of it in the Banner of the Covenant, 1850, Stuart's own magazine. By 1868, Stuart no longer believed it, and he had quite a number of supporters. Thus, almost the first matter of business in Synod was the Stuart case. Stuart was accused of pursuing divisive courses, openly and defiantly avowing that he had violated the Standards of the Church on Psalmody and Communion and would continue to do so.²⁰ A motion was made that he be suspended from the eldership and membership of the church,

¹⁸Advocate, January, 1868, p. 6.

¹⁹Since Steele, Crawford, and Woodside were members of the 2nd Presbytery of Philadelphia, there was no obstacle to their coming to Synod as delegates. They had enough supporters to elect Steele moderator.

²⁰Minutes, 1868, p. 211.

and his seat in this Synod consequently vacated. Discussion followed. Finally the problem was clearly stated:

. . . whereas there are well known and established laws in regard to the subjects of Psalmody and communion, in the former of which an inspired Psalmody, to the exclusion of all imitations and uninspired compositions, is to be used in the worship of God; and in the latter, declaring communion in sealing ordinances to be extended to those only whom we would receive to constant fellowship and become subject to the authority of this church; and whereas, George H. Stuart has openly and defiantly declared on various occasions on the floor of this Synod, that he has in the worship of God used imitations and uninspired compositions called hymns, and that he has communed with others and in other churches in sealing ordinances; and has declared that he will continue to do so; therefore, Resolved That by this avowed course of conduct G. H. Stuart has violated the laws of this church in these cases made and provided . . . and is hereby suspended from the eldership and membership of the Church.²¹

The vote resulted in twenty-eight in favor of suspension, fourteen opposed to suspension, and six abstentions. R. W. Chestnut, writing a brief history of our church blamed the disruption on "unwise words and hasty actions."²² This is, unfortunately, all too true of the Scottish temper, but it must be admitted that a doctrinal issue was at stake and one must wonder how a compromise between exclusive and non-exclusive Psalmody can be made! The sorry fact remains that the church was divided. Yet a sorrier fact, in the opinion of the writer, is that such a large minority of the men was willing to give up a tenet of

²¹Minutes, 1868, p. 228.

²²Chestnut, op. cit., p. 9.

faith without any theological explanation.²³ In this case those who held to the stated practice of the church on psalmody remained in the church while those who differed left. The split hurt the church deeply and many have blamed the decline of the church on exclusive Psalmody itself. But it was the last time that such a split occurred. For in the ensuing years such distinctive issues were avoided, evaded, unexplained, and undisciplined, with the futile hope that the church would be at peace and grow. It was precisely this attitude, however, more than the split itself, which led to the long-range decline of the church.

Following the action of the Synod of 1868 many ministers and members left the church, were independent for a time, and ultimately merged with other denominations. In December, 1868, the entire Saharanpur Presbytery was lost, as most of the foreign missions sided with their former treasurer.²⁴ In 1869 only twenty-four ministers appeared at Synod.²⁵

The next problem facing the church was that of union with another Presbyterian body. Since the recent

²³ Although a theological explanation might not be expected just at the time that a motion is made, the objection here is that at no time was an explanation made: a serious oversight for so divisive a problem.

²⁴ Advocate, December, 1868, p. 377.

²⁵ In 1868, there had been forty-eight voting members--some ministers, some elders. Just how many ministers there were altogether was not determined.

reunion of the United States and the Confederate States on a national basis, thoughts of union were paramount in the minds of many. In 1867, Drs. McLeod and Wylie with G. H. Stuart had been appointed as a Committee of Arrangement and Correspondence for a convention to discuss union with various Presbyterian branches.²⁶ Wylie, the delegate from General Synod to Synod, had presented the draft of a covenant already adopted by General Synod as a basis of union. It was hoped that cooperatively an improved edition of the Psalms could be made and Wylie had urged "the propriety and duty of using all proper means for securing union between the two bodies so nearly allied to one another," and he reported to General Synod that "the intercourse thus established is good. There appeared . . . evidence of such an improved state of feeling as gave omen of an amicable and promising intercourse for the future."²⁷ Would the divorce of 1833 be healed? The disruption of 1868 stalled all efforts, and the cautious Crawford wrote:

All are agreed that God's church should be one. But is this the time to unite? No, the churches are not united in doctrine. How is union to be brought about? By conventions? No. They haven't worked. . . . There is only possibility of uniting with 'former brethren' and United Presbyterians. But this has not been done.²⁸

The United Presbyterians drew up a basis of union but it was unsatisfactory to the Reformed Presbyterians because

²⁶Minutes, 1867, p. 213.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 204-205.

²⁸Advocate, October, 1868, pp. 313-18.

it said nothing on communion or the Psalms. In Synod many ministers asked for time to consider the possibility of union, but those from Western Presbytery insisted on immediate action.

When no immediate action was taken, four of the five ministers of Western Presbytery took their congregations plus the vacant congregations into the United Presbyterian Church.²⁹ Chestnut later described the action saying, "This stampede was one of the strangest acts to be found in the records of ecclesiastical gymnastics."³⁰ The four departing pastors took Presbyterian records with them, and claimed that Western Presbytery no longer existed. But Samuel Wylie of Eden, Illinois, remained in General Synod and reported that instead of having five strong congregations, there were ten weak ones. The bitterness thus generated against the United Presbyterians was most unfortunate. Discussions of merger ceased for a while.

Revived again, perhaps by the possibility of merger with the Old Lights, was the constitutional issue. In the 1860's this still remained the only barrier between the two Reformed Presbyterian groups. A national association had been organized for the purpose of drawing up an amendment to the federal constitution which would "suitably acknowledge

²⁹This included John McMaster, Princeton, Indiana; W. S. Bratton, Coulterville, Illinois; M. Harshaw, Concord, Illinois; J. K. Martin, Walnut Hill, Illinois. Chestnut, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁰Chestnut, op. cit., p. 11.

Almighty God as the author of the nation's existence and the ultimate source of its authority, Jesus Christ as its Ruler, and the Bible as the fountain of its laws."³¹ The 9th National Convention met in the Hall of the Cooper Union in New York City on February 20, 1873, and their requisition was signed by Judge Strong of the United States Supreme Court. The speakers at the Convention did not say that the Constitution was immoral or atheistic, nor that it was a crime to hold office or vote. To this extent they expressed the position of the General Synod. General Synod--and the speakers--did agree however that the omission of the name of God, Christ, and the Bible from the Constitution was a defect which should be remedied.³² They further agreed that it was:

. . . difficult to see how the proposed amendment is ever to succeed, unless representatives are sent to Congress who will favor it. No one can expect that infidels will send such representatives to the halls of legislation. Upon Christians, then, devolves the necessity of choosing out such men as favor the amendment. And if the Christian population of America would rise up in their might, and as a unit refuse to give their support to any but those who fear God and hate covetousness, the proposed alteration would soon come. Just as long, however, as the majority of American Christians oppose the amendment, and others judge it inconsistent with a Christian profession to take any part in sending Christian men to Congress, so long will the Constitution remain as it is.³³

Within a short time after the Convention, General Synod apparently felt that the Old Lights had not only

³¹Advocate, February, 1873, p. 105.

³²Advocate, April, 1873, pp. 132-33. ³³Ibid.

disdained their position (this would be expected) but had cast an ecclesiastical sneer in their direction. In self-defense, the June Advocate of 1873 states:

We, however, are happy to recognize as Reformed Presbyterian brethren all in every land who maintain a scriptural Testimony in behalf of the attainments and cause of the Reformation. It will be a sad day if all that is meant by Reformed Presbyterianism is not to exercise citizenship under the United States Constitution.³⁴

For the next dozen years or so, General Synod was concerned with its own internal problems. The Synod of 1873 was very poorly attended and the dire need of additional ministers in every presbytery was painfully apparent. Western Presbytery had eight churches and only two ministers; Chicago Presbytery had four churches and two pastors; Pittsburgh Presbytery reported that "the vacant congregations within our bounds are still numerous"; and in Philadelphia Presbytery there were several court cases in progress to establish property ownership of several vacant churches. Home mission work was carried on in Kansas and Tennessee and among Negroes in Alexandria and Brooklyn. The foreign mission board was seeking to regain some of that which was lost in India at the time of Stuart's suspension. The Theological Seminary, which had been functioning since 1810, was down to two students. In fact, the only part of the denominational activity that was flourishing was the Negro work in Brooklyn.³⁵

³⁴Advocate, June, 1873, p. 209.

³⁵Minutes, 1873, pp. 232-82.

An all-out effort was made to increase enrollment in the seminary with the result that when the school year opened on November 5, 1873, sixteen students were enrolled. A hopeful comment in the Advocate said, "Let these young men be carried through their course, and give themselves with zeal and earnestness to their work, and the church is safe for a quarter of a century."³⁶ Actually, only one of those sixteen entrants, Alexander Savage, served the church for an extended period of time,³⁷ but the encouragement from the seminary at that time off-set the continuing gloom of the churches at Synod in 1874. During that year, the Chicago church had closed and it was reported that "one fragment only remains in the form of a small Sabbath school for the study of the word of God, for mutual improvement, and to mourn over the desolation of Zion."³⁸

Toward the end of 1874, a six-point program for the improvement of the church was outlined in the Advocate. They were as follows:

1. Young men must be educated for the ministry.
2. Our domestic mission must be more liberally supported.
3. A foreign mission field should be selected and occupied during the present year. Suggest Liberia or at least somewhere in Africa. Must find a missionary.
4. We have to make the children of the church familiar with the history and principles of Reformed Presbyterians.

³⁶Advocate, December, 1873, p. 417.

³⁷Savage was pastor of the Darlington Reformed Presbyterian Church until his death in 1931.

³⁸Minutes, 1874, p. 264.

5. A larger attendance at the prayer meetings must be secured.
6. It is our work to search out the people of God among the masses, and persuade them to come with us and we will do them good. . . . Direct personal effort among the masses is our work.³⁹

Advocates and minutes are lacking for the next eleven years, but apparently the six-point program only served to point up other weaknesses, for the following article, entitled "Some Reasons" appeared in an 1885

Advocate:

That our church is not as strong and vigorous as she ought to be is evident. Being interested in its growth and prosperity, we should not object to an investigation. No doubt we will all agree that the greatest difficulty which retards the progress of the Reformed Presbyterian Church today, is the lack of a sufficient number of earnest devoted ministers. While it is true that all denominations can honestly say, 'the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few,' yet none can utter the mournful cry more truthfully than our own beloved church. In our church there are today ten vacant congregations. Who are to fill them? What is the cause of this great lack of laborers? We believe the doctrines of our church are true. We feel that its government is of divine right. The difficulty must arise either from the mismanagement of the machinery already in operation or from the lack of machinery and means. Some may be disposed to criticise our Theological Seminary. We need something back of the seminary to feed it. We never will have a full seminary until we establish a college to train young men for entering the ministry. All theological seminaries have colleges, under the care of their respective churches from which they draw about nine-tenths of their students, except our own. The seminaries of the UPC are abundantly supplied from their schools at Monmouth and New Wilmington; and our brethren on the other side of the house receive about four-fifths of their theological students from Geneva College.

³⁹Points 1 and 2, Advocate, October, 1874; points 3 and 4, Advocate, November, 1874; points 5 and 6, Advocate, December, 1874.

We must start a college--now or never.⁴⁰

In 1867, there had been a plea for financial aid for the church's missions; perhaps it had gone unheeded, for by 1885, that small shadow of hard years ahead had become a thunderbolt, threatening the very existence of the denomination. The preceding article had a further paragraph on that subject:

But there must be some other reason for the weakening of our church. Why have so many men deserted the ranks of our ministry? I believe the principal reason is lack of proper support. To think that a man, who has spent fifteen or twenty years of the best part of his life toiling over his studies, scrimping to maintain a livelihood, and perhaps by close application losing his health, is so little appreciated that a third rate book-keeper, who has perhaps spent six months or a year in preparing, can demand a better support. This low estimate of the value of the ministers' labor will kill any denomination. We have minister with families to support, preaching in congregations under the care of General Synod, for four hundred and fifty dollars a year.

The suggestions of the preceding article were followed through--to a certain extent. In 1896, Cedarville College, at Cedarville, Ohio, was organized. And considering the size of the denomination and the general lack of emphasis on college education, compared to the present day, the institution prospered. By 1910 the college had three buildings, one hundred students, twelve faculty members, and one hundred graduates.⁴¹ Advertisements in the church paper read:

⁴⁰Advocate, 1885, pp. 146-47.

⁴¹Advocate, June, 1910.

Up-to-date courses in Bible, English, Latin, Greek, French, German, Hebrew, Mathematics, Science, Philosophy, Economics, Sociology, Politics, Cooking, Sewing, Oratory, and Music. Well equipped Laboratories. Good Library. Large Gymnasium. College and University trained teachers. Best Moral and Religious Influences. Students received at any time.⁴²

The Rev. Dr. W. R. McChesney served as president for many years and at great sacrifice. The perennial problem of finances (apparently the second half of the 1885 article was unheeded) resulted in extremely low salaries for the faculty and Dr. McChesney was forced to ask for a raise since he could barely support his family on his meager remuneration and had repeatedly been offered a position at Wooster College. He remained at Cedarville until 1928 and was then replaced by Frank A. Jurket. Upon acquiring the Cedarville Campus the Seminary also located there. The educational branch of the church seemed securely established.

A matter of concern in the history of any church is that of the church paper. As has been previously stated the paper from approximately 1846 to 1867 was The Banner of the Covenant, published by G. H. Stuart. Following that came the Advocate, edited by David Steele and Nevin Woodside. By 1900 there were two papers, The Reformed Presbyterian Witness and the Advocate, neither of which was flourishing. In 1901, under the editorship of R. W. Chestnut, these two papers combined to form the Reformed

⁴² Almost any Advocate in the early 1900's.

Presbyterian Witness and Missionary Advocate. Chestnut alone was responsible for the editing and publishing of the magazine and stated later that "in those days the Synod gave little or no attention to the work."⁴³ In March, 1910, F. A. Jurket, professor at Cedarville College, became the editor and held that position until June, 1918, when Chestnut resumed it. In 1945, Chestnut asked to be relieved of the duty, and was replaced by J. W. Graham, clerk of Pittsburgh Presbytery,⁴⁴ who served for six years. When he resigned, the Reverend Harry Meiners, Jr., was appointed editor for the year⁴⁵ and remained editor until 1965!

The editors of the Advocate attempted to keep the readers informed on general current events in the world and the church itself tried to take an active part in current issues. The accusation by many liberal churches of the present day that the church still fights the battles of the 1680's is hardly tenable upon examination of the Advocate over a period of years. Almost invariably there has been an article on current political issues. This, at least to a certain degree, is a healthy sign, but it may be wondered if during World War I years this was not done

⁴³R. W. Chestnut, Autobiography, p. 49.

⁴⁴Minutes, 1945, Report of the Committee on the Advocate, p. 156. (Minutes incorporated in July Advocate.)

⁴⁵Minutes, 1951, p. 42.

to the near exclusion of denominational problems which should have been of distinct concern to the church. For the little magazine was filled month after month with articles on the war and on prohibition.⁴⁶ It may be agreed that both of these issues were timely, worthy, and highly important of consideration, and for their careful treatment of both subjects the editors may be commended. Yet although moral and political issues are the responsibilities of the church, they are not its sole responsibilities. Spiritual issues and the maintenance of the purity of the gospel should be the primary concern. At this time, they appeared to hold a tertiary rank. But with the close of the war and the beginning of the Prohibition era, the magazine reflects a greater concern for many areas of interest. Political issues were not excluded as an article on Boston and the Police Strike in 1919 demonstrates. Interest in mission work in various parts of the world was shown in articles on Islam and Evangelism in France. Doctrinal issues found their place again in articles on infant

⁴⁶ Advocate, June, 1916, p. 122 outlines how to make our nation an ideal one: 1) We must abolish the liquor traffic; 2) We must abolish Sabbath desecration; 3) We must abolish Mormonism.

Advocate, February, 1918, has an article entitled: "What My Church Stands For." It says, "The Covenanter Church has a noble and glorious heritage. It is too bad that in this latter day so many are ignorant of the glorious page that it occupies in history. . . . They handed down the Truth to the ages following, and every church today that bears the name of Presbyterian owes something to those heroes of the faith. . . . Are we living worthily of them? . . . No good Covenanter can encourage the liquor traffic in any shape or form. And especially in these times of war. The liquor traffic is worse than the Germans."

baptism, tithing, Psalmody, and Sabbath observance.

In many ways in the early 1920's the general outlook for the future was good. News from the congregations, found in every issue of the Advocate, was encouraging; Cedarville College was flourishing with one hundred thirty-eight students; and mission work at home and abroad was growing.

A brief look at the mission endeavors at this time is interesting here. As previously stated, the Saharanpur Presbytery almost in entirety severed its connection with the church in 1868. This step, taken "in undue and injurious haste" cost the church its property, its missionaries and its members in India. G. W. Scott wrote in 1894 that the work was brought to a standstill because of "unfaithfulness at home and misrepresentations abroad."⁴⁷ He attributed the unfaithfulness at home to "some who seemed to think that liberality had purchased a right to set aside the law and order of the church" and stated that "unbiased history will hold responsible" those who caused the disruption.⁴⁸ But in January, 1884, Scott arrived in Roorkee, center of former missionary activity, regained possession of one mission building, and began the work. Within ten years, three churches had been organized, prayer meetings and Bible studies were held in various places, book and tract distribution was carried on, and

⁴⁷G. W. Scott, A Brief History, p. 10.

⁴⁸Ibid.

two orphanages had been established.⁴⁹ Scott's work was continued by William Waide, and in 1914, Dr. and Mrs. John C. Taylor were accepted by the Foreign Mission Board to serve in India.⁵⁰ J. L. Chestnut who wrote a brief description of the meeting in which the Taylors were accepted said, "No one who was present will ever forget that solemn and inspiring scene."⁵¹ The author wonders if there is anyone yet living who was present at that meeting--besides the Taylors themselves. Fifty-two years after their arrival in India these amazing missionaries are still carrying on the work.

Another mission undertaking was that of Miss Martha J. Ramsey who started a Sunday School in Los Angeles. It was an attempt at "inner-city" missions and in 1911 Miss Ramsey reported an enrollment of about eighty children with an average attendance of forty to fifty, and stated that it was "in as good a condition as it has ever been."⁵² Miss Ramsey continued in her work until her death in October, 1958.⁵³

The third missionary outreach of the church was a "mountain mission" in Houston, Kentucky. The mission, founded in 1907 by Miss Elva M. Foster and Miss Susan

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 12-14.

⁵⁰Advocate, July, 1914, p. 162.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Advocate, April, 1911, p. 107.

⁵³A Memorial to Miss Ramsey can be found in the Minutes, 1959, p. 53.

Cunningham, was sponsored by the Associate Presbyterian Church until 1922 when it was purchased by the Reformed Presbyterians.

With encouraging news from all branches of the church, it is surprising to find in 1943 a weak and dwindling organization.⁵⁴ From the testimony of the members who lived through those years, it would seem that pressures from outside the church drew the young people away, and the Covenanter tradition of the church simply was not welcome in the society of American materialism. At first glance, this would appear to be reason enough for decline, and although it probably was the immediate cause there is little evidence that it was the sole underlying reason. Liberal critics often claim that it was the church's exclusiveness and its inability or unwillingness to cooperate with modernistic and liberal theological trends that led to its decadence. Again, there is no evidence for this. The only alternative is the possibility of doctrinal weakness inherent in the church--an unexplained abandoning of tenets previously sustained with unrelenting firmness and the absence of anything to fill the theological

⁵⁴No information has been found from 1922 to 1943. An "historical repository" with a complete set of Synod Minutes and Advocates, along with other interesting historical material, had been collected by R. W. Chestnut, and was kept in the oldest Reformed Presbyterian Church, Duanesburg, New York. On December 16, 1951, the entire building was destroyed by fire, and although valiant attempts were made to rescue the historical material, it was impossible. The account is found in the Minutes, 1952, p. 18.

gap. The story of abandonment began in 1886.

Close communion had been the practice of the church ever since Cameronian days, and the custom of presenting a "token" was used. The bearer's possession of the token indicated that he was a member in good standing of the church and had been present at the communion preparatory service. Outsiders were not permitted to participate in the sacrament. In 1886, the use of the token was brought into question because it was felt by many that it was no longer necessary; some apparently explained that the token had been simply the Covenanters' sign that the bearer was friend, not foe; not that the token had any significance of its owner having attended a preparatory service. In the Synods of 1886 and 1887 there was some discussion of the matter; in 1888 nothing was done about it; in 1889 it was argued again; finally in 1890 the discussion was postponed--indefinitely.⁵⁵ It was never brought up again; the issue was avoided, and gradually the churches adopted the policy of a weakly-restrictive communion: only avowed non-believers were refused.

A second issue, discussed and abandoned, was that of instrumental music. Covenanters had never used an instrument in services of divine worship. Agitation for instrumental music became noticeable in 1903 when merger with the Presbyterian Church USA was suggested, and when

⁵⁵Chestnut, Historical Sketch, p. 33.

this failed, it was again brought up at Synod in 1905. At the threat by many that they would leave the denomination if they were not permitted to use an instrument, it was decided that an instrument could be used if its use would cause no friction in the congregation.⁵⁶ This type of decision is enough to cause friction in itself. Those who favored instrumental music saw easily that one or two objectors in any single congregation could cause a great deal of trouble, so, disappointed with Synod's decision, seven ministers and their congregations left the denomination.⁵⁷ Had Synod made an authoritative statement one way or the other, these seven congregations might have remained in General Synod; however, it is equally obvious that if the ministers had actually been dedicated to the church's stand on all other points, they would not have left, since, after all, they had really gained what they wanted. As it turned out, one by one, congregations brought in pianos, then organs, and soon there was not a congregation that conducted worship without an instrument.

Perhaps this attitude of the avoidance of the issue was due to a basic lack of knowledge of what the church stood for. There is an interesting and very revealing article concerning the condition of the church in 1910.

In addition to the exercise of the Missionary

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁷Ibid.

spirit, each congregation should bear testimony for the truth. Not simply for truth in a general way, but for special truths in particular. Would it not be well for our people to re-read their catechism and Confession of Faith, and again get a summary of the truths to be maintained and the errors to be condemned?⁵⁸

In the following issue of the Advocate, "A word of Comment" by John Alford, pastor in Los Angeles says,

In addition to the catechism or confession of faith, I would add 'Reformation Principles Exhibited--The Testimony of the Church.' Next to the Shorter Catechism, our Testimony is Multum in Parvo.⁵⁹

It is startlingly obvious that doctrinal erosion, caused by ignorance, had already begun in the church by 1910. The indication that Reformed Presbyterian laity did not know the contents of the standards of the church adequately enough to do constructive work is bad enough; but when one of the standards of the church was omitted in the first article, this indicates that carelessness, if not ignorance, was prevalent in the ministerial ranks as well. John Alford alone rose to remind the church of its great document, Reformation Principles Exhibited. And this appears to be the last significant reference to it for nearly a half century.

If Reformed Presbyterians had known their catechism and confession it would have been needless to encourage them to read it again. In former years an applicant for

⁵⁸Advocate, January, 1910, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁹Ibid., February, 1910, p. 30.

membership in the church had to know what doctrines were included in the Westminster Confession and agree with them before he was admitted to the communion of the church. This must still have been the official position of the church in 1894 when Scott wrote,

A profession of adherence to these doctrines [distinctive Presbyterian and Covenanter principles] . . . is required of all on becoming members of the church, and also on receiving for themselves or their children the sacrament of baptism.⁶⁰

As late as 1917 one of the terms of the ecclesiastical communion in the church was an acknowledgement of the three subordinate standards of doctrine, but one wonders in light of the preceding articles if it was truly enforced.⁶¹ The requirements for membership in the church as of 1965 mention nothing concerning doctrine, stating only that members shall have made "a credible profession of faith in our Lord Jesus" and shall have "presented themselves to the session of the particular church for a witness thereof."⁶² The first requirement should hold for any Christian church; the second possesses strength only in proportion to the strength of the session of each individual congregation.

When a minister and his session firmly adhere to the doctrines of the Confession, it may be supposed that

⁶⁰Scott, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶¹Advocate, January, 1917, p. 3.

⁶²Form of Government, RPCES, pp. 4-5.

the members of that congregation also know what they believe. And if all the congregations have strong ministers, the denomination should be strong. But it became apparent, at least by 1953, that there was little hope for strength in the future. Only nine churches still remained in the entire Synod, with a total membership of 1279; none was actually without ministerial assistance at the time, but one church was served by a "student supply" and one by a "stated supply."⁶³ The seminary barely managed to function and reported three students in attendance: an Episcopalian, a Lutheran, and a member of the Church of Christ in Christian Union.⁶⁴ Cedarville College had been sold some years previous, but still continued to grant degrees to the graduates of the Seminary through an arrangement of affiliation. This affiliation had already caused some trouble in the church, however, since the two institutions were often advertised together. J. W. Graham, editor of the Advocate (1945-1951), stated in 1949 that he could no longer serve in that capacity for that reason, and in his report to Synod said that:

. . . it seems quite unwise to give our people, and other readers of the Advocate, the impression that Cedarville is our denominational college. Further, it seems even more unwise to advertise our Seminary as an affiliation with such an organization, about which General Synod is uncertain. The present editor cannot continue the

⁶³Minutes, 1953, Reports of Presbyteries, pp. 6-9.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 45.

advertisement of the college and seminary on its present basis and if it is the desire of the General Synod that the Advocate continue to accept such advertising, then another editorial arrangement will be necessary.⁶⁵

Graham's resignation was rejected and he was given a vote of confidence⁶⁶ apparently with the understanding that the advertising would be deleted, for the following year Graham reported that "we have not sought advertising but have been dependent on the Lord's people to provide through subscriptions, gifts . . ."⁶⁷ After the death of Dr. Frank Jurkat in 1954, Synod was uncertain as to what to do about the Seminary, and by 1955 all that remained was a list of assets and expenses.⁶⁸

The final section in the story of abandoning Covenanter distinctives is again the subject of Psalmody, and with it, the fate of one standard of the church, Reformation Principles Exhibited. It will be recalled that in 1868, the church decided in favor of exclusive Psalmody. For decades, this distinctive was not touched. From 1897 to 1909 a committee delegated from eight Presbyterian bodies worked on a revision of the Psalter. When it was completed, the only church that refused to accept

⁶⁵Minutes, 1949, p. 20. Cedarville College was turned over to the GARB convention in 1928. (See catalogue of Cedarville College.)

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁷Minutes, 1950, p. 12.

⁶⁸Minutes, 1955, pp. 20-24.

it was "Old Light" Synod.⁶⁹ The General Synod accepted it "with pleasure" and in the Advocates of 1910 and 1911 there appeared a series of articles on the Psalms by Dr. John Alford, which obviously consider the church as a still exclusively Psalm-singing group. In 1917 an outline was given for a Christian Endeavor program entitled "My Favorite Hymn" which the pastor writing the comments for Reformed Presbyterians changed to "My Favorite Psalm."⁷⁰ In another article an argument for the exclusive use of the Psalms in the worship service was written thus:

If we go astray, we do so in the way of self-restriction, or of failing to live up to the measure of our liberty. If our opponents go astray, it is in the way of overstepping limits assigned by God. In the one case timidity, close of kin to reverence, is evinced. In the other case boldness, bordering on audacity, is displayed.⁷¹

But by the 1940's very few Reformed Presbyterian churches sang the Psalms exclusively. Psalter-Hymnals were used in most churches and in the Report of the committee for the Revision of the Book of Discipline (in the latter 1940's) a note concerning Family Worship was made. Omitted was the statement, "Nothing is to be sung but some part of the scripture psalms to the exclusion of all paraphrases and imitations" and in its place was "Psalms and spiritual songs are divinely appointed for this purpose."⁷²

⁶⁹Advocate, June, 1910, pp. 137-38.

⁷⁰Advocate, August, 1917.

⁷¹Advocate, November, 1918, p. 211.

⁷²Minutes, 1949, p. 23.

The issue of Psalmody is not mentioned again except indirectly as it is included in Reformation Principles Exhibited. This book was called into question because it was an obstacle to the possibility of the merger of the Reformed Presbyterian and Evangelical denominations. In 1958, the total membership of the Reformed Presbyterian Church was down to 1121; death seemed virtually inevitable--except that unexpected events had occurred in other Presbyterian bodies.

In 1936 a group of conservative pastors and people had left the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America because of the process of excommunication directed against the conservative leader, J. Gresham Machen, and pursued through the courts of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly without extending to Dr. Machen the simple justice of allowing him to present his defense in these courts.⁷³ This small conservative group was called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and had as their main institution of training Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Very unfortunately in 1937, after the death of Machen, this small group divided over the issues of premillennialism and "the separated life." One group retained the former name, the other was styled Bible Presbyterian and was led by Dr. Carl McIntire. Both of these groups grew rapidly but each divided again; in 1948 several ministers of the

⁷³Minutes of the General Assembly, 1936 and Edwin H. Rian, The Presbyterian Conflict (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940).

Orthodox Presbyterian Church left because of certain philosophic issues as well as a problem involving support of a mission board; in 1958, the Bible Presbyterian Church divided over issues of personality and one group chose the name Evangelical Presbyterian, organized Covenant College and Seminary, and carried on an ambitious mission program.⁷⁴ The Reformed Presbyterian Church watched the actions of this Presbyterian trampoline and wondered who would bounce where, next! Particular objects of their interest were the former ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church who had been independent since 1948 or who had joined the United Presbyterian Church. In 1958 the United Presbyterians merged with the Presbyterian Church, USA, to the horror of those who had withdrawn from that very organization in 1936. Foremost among these men was Dr. Gordon H. Clark, who then chose to join the Reformed Presbyterian Church and was followed almost immediately by several other independent Presbyterian pastors and their churches. Within a year the membership of the church increased to 2020, a gain of nearly 100%. Most of the pastors who joined did so with a hope that a further merger would take place with one of the other conservative bodies.

The group most suitable with whom to discuss merger

⁷⁴The name was not actually decided on for several years, hence there was much confusion over the existence of two Bible Presbyterian Churches. However, for clarity in this paper, this author shall use the name Evangelical Presbyterian from 1958 on for the group that later chose that name.

was the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The two denominations were nearly identical except for three points: pre-millennialism, Christian liberty, and Reformation Principles Exhibited. To achieve union, the Evangelical Presbyterians had to act on the first two, and the Reformed Presbyterians on the third.

This standard of the church had been under attack since 1955. Synod had decided to revise the Book of Worship and Discipline and in 1955 after studying the committee's draft, certain additions and corrections were proposed by the various Presbyteries. In the section on ordination questions the remark was made that "the publication Reformation Principles Exhibited [should] be made available to churches or not included in these questions."⁷⁵ It was a point well taken since the book was out of print, copies were scarce, and in all honesty the church had not been obeying its rules for some time anyway. The following year the Committee on the Book of Discipline answered the suggestion by saying:

Is General Synod willing to delete Reformation Principles Exhibited as a doctrinal standard of our church? If we do, will we thereby cease to be Reformed Presbyterian and therefore will there be changes in some of our finances and charters of Boards, etc. Synod is at the crossroads here and must decide.⁷⁶

By 1958 and 1959, talk of merger with the Evangelical

⁷⁵Minutes, 1955, p. 9.

⁷⁶Minutes, 1956, p. 45.

Presbyterians grew more serious. It was moved that the committee to examine the use of Reformation Principles Exhibited as a standard of the church consist of the members appointed to the Committee on Union with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.⁷⁷ Six men were appointed and drew up a plan of union, omitting the book as a standard of doctrine.⁷⁸ A resolution unanimously adopted stated that "we are happy to note that our Fraternal Relations Committee took the initiative in making Reformation Principles Exhibited a document reflecting our great heritage rather than a subordinate standard."⁷⁹ From the timid query "will we thereby cease to be Reformed Presbyterian" in 1958, to the bold declaration "we are happy . . ." in 1959, a great shift of attitude had taken place. In actuality, little or no shift in practice was necessary: The Reformed Presbyterian Church had long since ceased to be truly Reformed Presbyterian.

Plans for merger progressed, though to the men who had arranged the terms of union they seemed to move slowly. The Evangelical Presbyterians were hesitant to relinquish their distinctives and to accept the name "Reformed Presbyterian." But at last, the doctrinal issues were settled and the title "Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod" was accepted. The two denominations

⁷⁷Minutes, 1958, p. 38. ⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁷⁹Minutes, 1959, p. 31, in resolution presented by R. W. Gray.

became one on April 6, 1965, in a move quite different from the shattering actions of the previous thirty years. Not a single church was lost in this act of cooperation.

"RPCES" in 1965 is an active organization with a college, seminary, mission stations in fourteen foreign countries as well as ambitious mission projects in the home field, a total of 103 churches, and membership of 10,000. The ministers all adhere officially to Reformed standards with such statements as "absolutely the best" and "Reformed teaching and Biblical teaching are synonymous terms."⁸⁰ But when asked about "Covenanter distinctives" the majority were not sure what the distinctives were. Of those who knew the issues involved only a few held that Psalmody and close communion had any relevance for the church today. One pointed out the illogicality of the church's practice of close baptism but not close communion. Another published an article in which he wrote,

There is no better singing than Psalm singing. God is pleased with this and will bless accordingly. Can the reason be for the superficiality of so much of our twentieth century Fundamentalism that professing Christians have neglected this most important divine order?⁸¹

Others have said, "matters of instrument use, psalm singing, etc. . . . are irrelevant and probably a barrier to grace if made a great issue" and "the principles

⁸⁰From a questionnaire sent to RPCES pastors.

⁸¹H. F. MacEwen, "The Bible Presbyterian," February, 1966, p. 4. It is interesting to note that Mr. MacEwen is a graduate of Juilliard School of Music.

relating to exclusive Psalm singing without musical instruments are not Scriptural." As for catechetical instruction it is revealing to discover that of fifty-one pastors interviewed only twenty had any plan for teaching it and only thirteen had preached a series of sermons on the Westminster Confession, with another thirteen using it as a basis for an occasional sermon or prayer meeting topic. Only one church still sings Psalms exclusively while twenty-five sing no Psalms at all.

In early America the emphasis of the Reformed Presbyterian Church shifted from the problems caused by the Revolution Settlement to those caused by the Constitution. In 1833 the emphasis shifted from the Constitution to intra-denominational problems. Inability to resolve these problems successfully and the weak avoidance of them brought on a long era of lethargy, broken only by another shift in emphasis. The Reformed Presbyterian Church is now primarily interested in standing forth as a conservative influence in American society, distinctly separate from the liberal "ecumenical movement" and actively reaching men and filling their spiritual and material needs. It may be that growing dissatisfaction with non-doctrinal ecumenism and the creedal changes proposed in the UPUSA Church will bring further accessions to this conservative church.

APPENDIX A

345 Buckingham Drive
Indianapolis, Indiana
November 4, 1965

Dear R.P.C.E.S. Pastor!

In attempting to write a thesis on the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, I am anxious to draw some comparison of our church as it stands today with our church as it was 150 years ago. In order to make a fair comparison I have formulated some questions which appear to be crucial in the history of our church, and yet concerning which I feel there may be a certain degree of variation within our denomination. If you wouldn't mind answering these questions I would certainly appreciate it, though, of course, you are under absolutely no obligation. A brief answer will be sufficient, though if you wish to write a thesis on any of these points yourself, I won't object!

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Betsy Clark

QUESTIONNAIRE

Have you preached a series of sermons on the Westminster Confession in the last five years? _____

Do you operate a plan for having your people memorize the Shorter Catechism? _____

What is your personal viewpoint concerning the tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in these documents? (You may answer on back side.)

What proportion of your congregational singing is Psalms? _____

How do you determine admittance to the Lord's Table--

- a) close (members of denomination only) _____
- b) restricted (to those who believe and are members in good standing of an Evangelical church) _____
- c) restricted (to those who believe--member of a church or not) _____
- d) no restrictions _____

Have you read any Covenanter history? What books did you consider outstanding or helpful?

What do you feel the church's stand should be concerning secret societies

- a) should a lodge member be permitted to hold church office? _____
- b) should a lodge member be permitted to be a member in good standing in the R.P.C.E.S.? _____

Do you feel that the historic theological distinctives of our Covenanter heritage are relevant today?
If not, explain briefly why not.
If so, specify to what extent.

APPENDIX B

345 Buckingham Drive
Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear R.P.C.E.S. Pastor,

First of all, a big THANK YOU to each of you who replied to my questionnaire! I certainly appreciate the time and thought that you put into it, for it will help me in making what I hope is a fair comparison of our church today to our church a century ago. I thought you would like to know the results of the questionnaire--and even if you did not answer it, you might find the results interesting. So far, I have received fifty replies; the apparent numerical discrepancy in the answers is due to the fact that not everyone replied to every question, which is understandable due to certain situations.

1. Have you preached a series of sermons on the West. Conf. in the past 5 years?
 Yes - - 13
 No - - 21
 An occasional sermon, or at prayer meeting - - 13
2. Do you operate a plan for teaching the Catechism?
 Yes - - 27
 No - - 20
3. What proportion of your congregational singing is
 Psalms?
 100% - 1
 50-75% - 2
 25-50% - 3
 1-25% - 16
 0% - 25
4. How do you determine admission to the Lord's Table?
 a) close - - - - - 0
 b) restricted to members - - 15
 c) restricted to believers - 32
 d) no restrictions - - - - 0

5. Have you read any Covenanter history? (See bibliography for suggested books.)
 More than five books - - 4
 One to five books - - - 17
 Scattered information (general church history texts) or none - - - - - 28
6. Should a lodge member be permitted to hold church office?
 Yes - - 7
 No - - 33
 Should a lodge member be permitted to be a member in good standing?
 Yes - - 29
 No - - 13

Question #3 concerning the tenets of the Reformed Faith and Question #8 concerning the "historic theological distinctives of our Covenanter heritage" were not intended to be redundant, though many of you felt they were and answered them as such. Thus in my evaluation, I am considering your two paragraphs as a reply to a single question. Please excuse me for not making my questions clear. For those of you who did figure out what I meant and answered concerning the distinctives--thank you very much! The distinctives of our church after 1833 were:

- a) exclusive Psalmody
- b) close communion
- c) non-instrumental music in worship
- d) acceptance of West. Conf. as prerequisite to church membership

Prior to 1833 we also held to non-participation in civil affairs--though I am finding interesting and tempting information which leads me to believe that this distinctive was actually dropped in 1812. My main problem now is to find when and why we dropped these four other distinctives. Anybody want to help me out????

Many of you added explanatory notes to various answers that you gave which cannot be restated in a brief report like this. But the extra notes help me in my evaluation, so you can be sure that they are not overlooked. Finally, since many of you asked for a bibliography of Covenanter books, I am adding a list chosen from the books various ones of you recommended. I'm giving you my own comments where I can, but I suggest you read the books for yourself!!

Again, good pastor-friends, many thanks!

Yours in His Service,

N. Elizabeth Clark

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May I take the privilege of adding here one of my favorite
books by one of my favorite friends--Cotton Mather. (His
only fault was that he didn't belong to RPCEs!) The little
book, with crooked type and odd words is called Manuductio
ad Ministerium. It is a real gem, and I do hope you can
find it in some dusty library someday. HAPPY READING!

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